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RESTFUL THOUGHTS IN
RESTLESS TIMES.



RESTFUL THOUGHTS IN
RESTLESS TIMES.

BY

C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

DEAN OF LLANDAFF,

AND MASTER OF THE TEMPLE.

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PREFACE.

THIS little Volume consists of a selection of Sermons preached within the last few years, either in the Temple Church, or in Llandaff Cathedral, or (in a few cases) in both. The general title has special reference to some of the latest in the Volume: but it is hoped that it may not be found wholly inapplicable to any.

‘Next to a sound rule of faith, there is nothing of so much consequence as a sober standard of feeling in matters of religion.’ May that wise maxim of *The Christian Year* be the prevailing influence, as it has been the guiding principle, of the suggestions here offered to the reader.

LLANDAFF,

January 7, 1893.



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I.

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE CROSS.

Matthew xxvii. 42.

Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.

SO spoke the priests, the scribes, and the elders of Israel, as they passed and repassed the cross on which Jesus hung. It was insult, it was mockery, it was cruel cutting sarcasm. It was more. It was a reproach, it was a challenge, and it was a temptation.

Those nails, they said, piercing hand and foot, could be willed away in one moment by the Divine. To hang there, in the impotence of humanity, by the sentence of a provincial court, under the watch and guard of a few policemen, of a handful of soldiers, as one of the meanest and vilest of malefactors—being all the time, as Thou sayest, King of Israel, Son of God—is not only a wilful waste, a gratuitous self-sacrifice, a practical suicide—it is also a wanton trifling with

the faith of men, with the convictions of consciences, and so with the destinies of souls. It is not foolish only as against Thyself, it is untrue, it is cruel, it is wicked. We ourselves are men of open mind and candid judgment—we are acting under a conviction which, if it be erroneous, it is Thine to reverse—give us, in common justice, this sign, this evidence, which we ask of Thee—come down from the cross, and we will believe.

Thus the mockery passed on into reproach. To suffer Thyself to suffer, to let wicked hands bind and scourge and crucify, is no merit, no beautiful exhibition of meekness or patience, it is to confuse and intermix things that differ, it is to mislead and deceive men on vital subjects, it is to make them put darkness for light and light for darkness in things belonging to their eternal welfare, if, all the while, Thou art no impostor but the very Son of God, from Him come, and to Him returning.

Thus the reproach passed, finally, into a temptation. Ought He indeed to be deaf to this challenge—come down from the cross, and we will believe? Here was, once again, and for the last time, the very wile of the tempter foiled in the wilderness, ‘If Thou be the Son of God, make this stone bread—cast Thyself from this pinnacle—all this glory will I give Thee.’ Spare Thyself cross and grave, spare Thy people

centuries, millenniums, of conflict and woe—come down from this cross, and all will believe!

It is plain that the human heart of Christ felt the force of such an appeal. When Peter rebuked Him for predicting His own crucifixion, saying, 'Be it far from Thee, Lord, this shall not be unto Thee,' He showed His sensitiveness to that particular argument by seeing the 'Satan' within the 'Simon'—the voice is Peter's voice, but the suggestion and the persuasion is another's—and reading, in the tenderness of the love which would spare Him suffering, the seductiveness of the temptation which would divert Him from sacrifice.

For what indeed was it to which the proposal of the text challenged Him?

Come down from the cross, and we will believe Thee?

Come down from it by and bye, when loving lips shall have begged from Pilate the lifeless body, that loving hands may prepare it for its orderly sepulture in the rich man's tomb—yes! For then obedience will have had its perfect work, having been 'even unto death.' Yes, for then the work will have been accomplished, for the sake of which God so loved the world that He spared not His own Son. Yes, for then the belief nominally offered will have become a faith living and active, a faith in that whole work and

that sufficient sacrifice which to come down now from the Cross, the life of mortality still alive in Him, would for ever have marred and spoiled and ruined.

Till then, no! Rather let heaven and earth pass!

When they said, so plausibly and so confidently, 'Come down now, and we will believe Thee,' what were they asking, and what were they offering?

They were claiming, first of all, to be the supreme and absolute judges as to the nature and as to the quantity of that evidence which should suffice to attest a Divine Revelation. They were saying in effect to the God of the spirits of all flesh, If Thou speakest, Thou shalt speak with this voice and none other. Thou shalt give us just this, or just that, which we will prescribe to Thee, in proof that Thou art really dealing with the work of Thine own hands. If nothing less than a sign from heaven will satisfy us—a bright light in the sky, a sudden articulate voice, a known person coming back to us from the dead—Thou shalt give us that. Thus they showed themselves blind to the very object and purpose of evidence. They were ignoring altogether its moral aspect—its action as a discipline, training men for ultimate satisfaction by pains taken and by patience exercised in

search, study, and comparison—its value as the stimulus of effort, and as the growing gathering reward of long and diligent enquiring.

Brethren, these are thoughts of infinite importance in their application to our own times. There is an impatience, there is an insolence, in demanding, which would make any answer impossible, because injurious to the questioner. We too, like these priests and scribes, mistake the very meaning of evidence. We imagine the object of evidence to be the settlement of a question of fact. If it can be demonstrated that Jesus Christ died and rose again, the work is done. Brethren, the work is not done. It is not begun. Faith is not an opinion—not even (in the common sense) a belief—it is a life. These chief priests thought, or spoke as if they thought, that the thing wanted was a mere admission, a mere conviction at all events, that Jesus is Christ. Therefore they said, Let Him come down from the cross, in spite of nails and cords, in spite of Roman centurion and quaternion of soldiers, and we will believe. The condescending patronizing acknowledgment of a new Messiah is the thing wanted, and we will give it on these terms—a descent from the cross to resume the life of this world.

And we have a right (they say) to name the terms. The object being the confession of Jesus

as the Christ, we are entitled to say what kind and what amount of evidence will be satisfactory. The very tone is insolent. It bewrays the incapacity of the speaker for the examination of any evidence which would not do him more harm than good.

‘We will believe Him.’ We will do Him that honour. We will pay Him that compliment. We will go forth to the next day’s work, to the next Sabbath’s synagogue, admitting that we saw a wonderful sight yesterday or on Friday last, and are satisfied by it that the promised Messiah is come. If He should head a rising against Rome, we will follow Him. If He should say, Pay no more tribute to Cæsar, we will answer, Master, we know that Thou art true and carest for no man.

We see then, not only what they asked in the text, but also what and how much it was that they offered. Come down from the cross, and we will believe. Believe what? believe whom? Give an intellectual assent to the truth of the new Gospel. Add it to our beliefs, make it find room among our tenets, that Jesus of Nazareth is the coming Man, is the Son of David, is the King of Israel. Would that have profited them? Would that have turned the Pharisee into a spiritual worshipper, or the scribe into a disciple instructed unto the kingdom of heaven?

Brethren, there are those who still say in their hearts—and with one of two definite meanings—‘Let Christ come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.’

1. The doctrinal ‘offence of the cross’ has not ceased. There are those in this day who would rid the Gospel of the cross, as the cross of atonement and propitiation, and count that they were lightening the storm-tossed vessel of the faith by that compromise. You may imagine—it is a natural idea—that Christ the Saviour of sinners is more attractive to the human heart than God the Creator and Judge. Experience modifies this impression. For one man who loves Christ but shrinks from God, I believe that there are thousands who feel that Christ, the Christ of the Bible, stands between them and God, not as a link but as a bar. They do not see—nor can I tell them—why infinite love should not blot out transgression by a mere stroke of the pen, by a mere volition of the will, rather than by the more costly and elaborate expedient of a cross and a propitiation.

I cannot tell them—because neither does the Book of God tell. This is one of the indeed mysteries—one of the Divine secrets not told—the why and the how of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

But this we can see—and this is enough for

us—that sin is a very terrible and a very real thing—that sin is a great power—that sin has brought in with it into God's beautiful creation effects and consequences so frightful that we could believe any thing that God might tell us of the difficulties and the obstacles which beset its cancelling. We could believe God if He said to us, This abominable, this cruel, this adulterous, this murderous thing, which you all see brings forth fruit every day and in every direction unto death, required what the Bible in one single singular unique passage calls 'the blood of God' to purge it away. The cross is that—the blood of God taking away sin.

Brethren, it is the living amongst it—it is the living in it—which makes us make so light as we do of sin. No man could say, 'Let Christ come down from the cross, and then I will believe Him,' if he was not blinded and deafened and heart-hardened by familiarity with sin. If we could for a moment stand a little way off from it, and then look again—if we could look upon it in its working in some other planet, not our own, and upon some other kind and race of being, we ourselves being free from it—we might form a truer idea. Alas, we are dazzled, we are mesmerized, we are infected by it, and therefore we say, O, if God had just sighed or smiled it away—O, if Christ would but come down from

the cross, and become again the gentle Jesus of the little children and the marriage in Cana of Galilee and the dinner in Simon's house, would I not fly to Him, would I not believe Him? Or if I might but think that He hung upon the cross just to show His sympathy with human suffering in its worst form, its form of shame and cruelty and injustice and ingratitude, for all that I could admire and I could love Him—only not this sin-bearing pure and simple, this vicarious, this inexplicable propitiation. 'Let Christ only come down from the cross,' or at least excuse me from seeing Him there, or from understanding what He is doing there, 'and I will, I will, believe Him.'

If the matter were less vital, we might say, I congratulate you upon your unacquaintance with sin—I congratulate you upon that slightness and distance of contact with sin which makes you thus wish the cross out of the Gospel. But no, we cannot say this, when we know that faith in Christ's blood is the very condition and the very *differentia* of a Christian. Rather then would we wish you a deeper and a truer insight into sin as sin, and into your own infection with it. Ah! it is the world which clothes and mystifies sin till it is half disguised and half transformed. The world is in love with sin. What would it do without it? Where would be the zest and

sparkle of its conversation, if it had not sin to furnish forth its tables with the newest innuendo and the latest scandal? Sin as bad taste, and sin as crime, it can faintly or loudly stigmatize—sin as sin it ignores or it condones—sin as done against God, sin as expiated on the cross of Christ.

Thus when the sceptic, the ancient or the modern, says in his heart, ‘Let Christ quit the cross, and I will believe Him,’ what does he offer as his price? I will believe Him—yes, as an amiable Person—yes, as an indulgent, charitable, tolerant Person—yes, as a Person who lived among the poor and suffering, fed the hungry, healed the sick, pointed the eyes closing upon earth to a heaven where the tears are wiped away, and where the sponge is gently passed over all the consequences of human sinning. I will believe in Him as all this, and set down my belief as quite enough to entitle me, when I die, to a place in the many mansions—may they be as like earth as possible—of a world painless and peaceful. This shall be my Christ. I have constructed Him for myself out of the rude material of the Gospels. He has come down from His cross, and I will believe Him.

2. There is yet another sense in which the cross may be wished out of the Gospel. Sometimes in Scripture the cross stands for atone-

ment—but sometimes, perhaps even oftener, it is the symbol of suffering. The first time the word ‘cross’ (or its Aramaic equivalent) was on the lips of the Incarnate, it was in this connexion. ‘He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.’ He had not yet at that time, in so many words, predicted His own crucifixion. He used a figure of speech, to describe the life of a disciple, which must have been terribly startling while it had not yet Calvary to explain it. To take up one’s cross—lightly as men and women use the phrase now, utterly as they profane it by applications trivial and insignificant—to take up one’s cross is to regard oneself as a criminal on the way to execution, to acknowledge the sentence just, and to live the very life in submitting to it. It is the opposite of that light and easy kind of living which saunters or sports or frolics while it can, and postpones into a dim indefinite tomorrow all the stern realities and all the terrible responsibilities of a sinner on his way to judgment.

‘Let Christ come down now from the cross’ becomes, in this second aspect, the desire to be excused from the Christian life as a life of struggle and conflict, of self-denial and self-conquest, in the matters of sin and duty.

And who is there, of us all, who has never in

this sense prayed the prayer of the text? Who has not said a thousand times in his heart, If I might but be excused this one item of effort, if I might but be allowed this one drop and crumb of sinning, if the Christ of my Gospel would but in this sense come down from His cross, how gladly would I follow Him, how devotedly would I believe Him, in all else?

The demand answers itself. The Christian intelligence repudiates the utterance. None the less there is a reluctance and a repugnance in all of us to the particular thing in which the cross presses and galls us. We find a thousand excuses for smoothing down its sharp edges and 'sewing pillows' to the shoulder which must carry it to the grave.

Let us try a bolder and a nobler treatment. Let us lie low at the foot of the cross of the great sacrifice till we become ashamed of the very paltriness of the sacrifices to which it summons us. It is there and there only, in the contemplation, till contemplation becomes admiration, admiration love, and love imitation, of Him who died for us, that we shall ever learn that sort of cross-bearing which alone is Christian, because at once thorough and heart-deep, at once aspiring and humble. Then shall we begin to pray not that Christ may come down from the cross but that He will lift us up to it—

making us partakers (in some sort) of His suffering, that so we may be at last—they are His own words—‘with Him where He is.’

TEMPLE CHURCH,

February 20, 1887.

II.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THINKING.

Matthew xvii. 25.

When he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon?

‘WHAT thinkest thou?’ is the question—and it is asked by Jesus Christ. The religious aspect of the process which we call thinking—the heavy responsibility of forming an opinion, whatever the subject, and in proportion to its gravity—this is our subject.

And first of all, what is ‘thinking’?

We speak here not of the process of thinking, but of its result. We speak not of thinking about a thing, but of that thinking a thing, which is otherwise called opinion.

Now thought (in this sense) may be said to have two mental states below and two above it. The two below it are, fancying, and guessing—the two above it are, believing, and knowing.

And yet, when the question is firmly pressed home, 'What thinkest thou?' in how many cases, or how many subjects, does the thinking resolve itself into fancying. The idea has suggested itself or has been suggested—that is all. What else can we call the political opinion of half the voters, in an election which is to decide the national conduct for the coming three or five or seven years? Some one has said, some one has predicted, some one has promised, this or this—therefore they think it, and think a thousand things consequent upon it—amongst others, that a whole policy, in Church and State, is the right thing for the country.

This is the lowest thing below thinking. Even guessing is above fancying. A guess may be felicitous—a guess may be sagacious—may be the result of experience, may be formed on a knowledge of the like—the thing may come true—the man may be a weather-prophet at least—when the sky is red, at morning or at evening, he can say foul weather or fair accordingly. Still to guess, if above fancying, is below thinking.

There are two mental states below, and there are two mental states above thinking. 'I believe' is above 'I think' this or that. To believe implies something of evidence—there must have been a hearing, however perfunctory, of two

sides, and a judging. To know is more still. No evidence however strong, no judgment however painstaking, can make you know a lie. You may fancy, you may guess, you may think, you may believe it—know it you cannot, because it is false.

Midway then amongst these names and titles of mental states—two of which are above and two below it—stands thought. ‘What thinkest thou, Simon?’ To think a thing is to have an opinion. It may be right or wrong, or a mixture of right and wrong. Simon’s thought, on this occasion, had something in it. It was not mere fancy. It was not mere conjecture. It was opinion. He argued thus. ‘My Master is an Israelite. Whatever else He is—and it has already dawned upon me, I have given utterance to the conviction, that He is something else—it has pleased Him thus far to act within the precincts of a true though sinless humanity—and therefore I suppose that it will please Him in this instance to obey the law, and to pay this temple-tax like His countrymen.’ This was thinking. Reason went to it, reflection, comparison, inference. It was not knowing, for it was mistaken—but it was not fancying, for it could give a reason.

‘What thinkest thou, Simon?’ Which of us can bear the brunt of that question in reference

to matters of the higher life? I know that in the life of business, commercial or professional, the opinion of many here present would be intelligent, would be valuable, would be decisive in its application to interests of large and wide concern—is every day asked and taken and acted upon—just because with them an opinion is the result of thinking—not a fancy, not a guess, if it cannot (seeing that two opinions may be in conflict) rise quite to the loftiest height, of knowing. But in matters of the higher life—and I include, among these, concerns of the collective life as well as of the individual—who shall say, and have the right to say it, I think this or this?

When we subtract influences of birth and family, of connexion and circumstance, of habit and prepossession, of authority on the one hand and impatience of authority on the other, what is left, in our politics, for thinking, pure and simple? If we could place ourselves in imagination for one moment on a lower level, and suppose that we were agricultural labourers or underground miners suddenly informed that we had a vote in the election of legislators, and consequently a voice in the solution of the most complicated problems of social, national, and international relations—should we not almost smile in the face of one who should say to us,

and perhaps emphasize and accentuate the word, 'What thinkest thou, Simon?' 'But tell me, what thinkest thou?'

And yet there is a responsibility in thinking, even if we stop with politics. By reason of our thinking (so called), after certain mechanical processes of addition and subtraction have been gone through, questions of great domestic and foreign concern will be settled, laws will be made which may either consolidate or dismember the Empire, and the course of English history will be turned this way or turned that way, with incalculable consequences to generations yet unborn. Opinion is free, opinion is powerful—if that were all, in the same degree opinion must be responsible.

Worse things might happen, you will say, than that unthinking men should, half at random, just swell the ranks of party. You are sure then of having great men, experienced men, very possibly disinterested and patriotic men, on either side, in the van and front of you. Worse things might happen than that unthinking men should say, 'Measures for others—men for me.' There are sure to be some thinking men on both sides—let them do the thinking for the rest.

This is indeed to make a mockery of the franchise. There could hardly be too few voters, if this be the meaning of them.

This is not only unphilosophical, it is immoral teaching. The man who votes without thinking will do other things without thinking. There is an indolence in human nature which loves to depute where self, the lower self, will not suffer for it. The same mind which deputes its politics will depute its morals—and here we are in a region in which indifference is ungodliness and complaisance sin. The question of the text, ‘What thinkest thou, Simon?’ has run on by this time into another Scripture question, ‘What think ye of Christ?’

Here too thought is free. Days of penal statute-books for atheism and blasphemy are practically past and gone: no wise man greatly regrets them—certainly no wise man will try to force them back. Thought is free—the expression of thought is free. Gamaliel’s axiom is universally accepted now, ‘Let these men alone...If this thing be of men, it will come to nought—if it be of God, no punishment and no persecution will overthrow it.’ Liberty of thinking and speaking is a sacred right—every book-stall and every platform is its witness. It is well. No man was ever made either wise or moral by compulsion. No man was ever made or kept a Christian by its being illegal for him to be an infidel. Nor is it any gain, on the whole and in the long run, to Christianity itself

to be guarded from the breath or the touch of scepticism. The mere suspicion of protection is a challenge to incredulity: 'the truth,' whether as the synonym of the Gospel, or as the synonym of the Saviour, has nothing to fear from examination and nothing to gain by privilege.

Thought is free as air, and the expression of thought, if checked at all, is checked not in the name of truth but in the name of decency. Persecution of thought is exploded as an anachronism even before it is renounced as a futility. The right to think is secure: it is a matter of courtesy, of good manners, to make room for it. 'What thinkest thou?' is the question: if necessary, 'I think otherwise' must be the rejoinder: 'let the rest judge.'

Does not the mere statement say to us, This right, universally claimed, universally conceded—the right to think, and to say what you think, and to act upon it, in all but every direction, without let or check—must be also a serious, a weighty, even a terrible responsibility?

We have seen, in one department of thinking, how reckless, how random, may be its exercise. Opinions taken at second and third hand—opinions the mere echo of a name, the mere shadow of a personality—opinions which a mere whim, some personal offence, some unintentional

slight, may tomorrow change into their opposite—these may set up and pull down rulers, these may mutilate or disintegrate empires. Opinions vehemently held today, lightly reversed tomorrow—opinions which it was convenient for party purposes to profess, and which the same party purposes may make it convenient to repudiate—these are specimens of the kind of thinking which governs us, and which a goodnatured and easy-going populace forgives and forgets with it. These things ought not so to be. Circumstances alter many things; a stereotyped uniformity is no more statesmanship than it is religion: but there are things against which waves of circumstance ought to beat vainly if vehemently; and there are principles, principles of judging and acting, formed early and kept late—the child the father of the man, and the man the father of the immortal.

Alas, in religion also how superficial, how casual, how careless, is thought! ‘What thinkest thou, Simon,’ of the three subjects—God, the soul, and eternity? The reflexion (so often quoted) of the old Greek historian, ‘So indolent for most men is the quest of truth!’ has a grave and a sad application here. ‘What thinkest thou?’ Well, I imagine a thing or two—I paint to my mind’s eye a future existence, very like the present, only without its

tears and without its remorse. I conjecture a thing or two—peradventure there is a something to suffer, and a something to enjoy, in a world altogether out of my sight—peradventure there is an Atonement, peradventure there is a God. Fancy, conjecture, yes: thought, opinion—thought that moves action, opinion that shall shape conduct—no, not one. To believe, to know, is far, far out of reach—to think is beyond me. I lighted, by accident, in my home, upon a creed and a worship—two or three religious notions, survivals of the nursery, still haunt me—I sometimes go to hear a sermon, once or twice in my life I have communicated—some new thing in theology, or more probably the explosion of some old thing, I now and then get a glimpse of in a review or a newspaper—‘What thinkest thou?’ I just suspend all, and wait. ‘What thinkest thou?’ Nothing.

Is it needful to say to any one that such a habit of mind must be dangerous—dangerous, I had almost said, either way—by which I mean, whether Christianity be true or false? It is a disrespectful, an insulting attitude towards truth itself. If there be any future—nay, if there be no future after this life—such a state of mind must have its Nemesis. It must react upon the strength, mental and moral: it must relax the fibre, it must spoil the virtue (if virtue means

manliness) of the being. With regard to the Gospel specially, it is not only irreverent, it is irrational. It begs the whole question. It presupposes the falsehood of the very claim you have to try. The Gospel says that religion is a life; that to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, is the life demanded of us; that the life, so defined, will hereafter be judged. How then if the life is one pause—a suspended animation—the course never shaped, the idea of it never formulated? ‘What thinkest thou?’ Nothing.

I hope it will not be thought fanciful to connect with this question, for a moment in conclusion, the words next preceding it. ‘When he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him’—anticipated, by His divine intuition, what Peter had to tell or what Peter might have asked—‘saying, What thinkest thou, Simon?’ I have a strong impression that in every matter, even intellectual, even social, even professional, even political, the whole difference would be made by hearing Christ Himself say to us, ‘What thinkest thou?’

Not only is there a serious risk in mere postponement and procrastination—a serious risk in mere indefiniteness and vagueness—which would be precluded by having the question forced upon us by *any* one, ‘*What thinkest*

thou?' 'what *thinkest* thou?' 'what thinkest *thou*?'—not another, not thy nearest neighbour, but thou thyself—of this or that? what thinkest thou of this vote which thou art to give, of this side which thou art about to take, of this question which is agitating and lacerating the mind of England, and upon which thou, citizen or senator, art called to pronounce thyself? what thinkest thou of this Saviour whom thou art either to confess or to deny by this word which thou wouldest speak, by this action which thou art to do? is He thy Lord and thy God, or is He, thinkest thou, the pretender and the impostor, decked in false colours of beauty and glory, that the infidel and atheist of the platform and the lecture-hall would make Him? Not only this—which might savour of a human expediency if it stood alone—but to hear *Christ* say, 'What thinkest thou?' is to lift the matter instantly into a region of elevation and sanctity in which neither dallying nor trifling is possible: it is to see that countenance, as of the sun shining in his strength—to hear that voice, as the voice of many waters—both alike of Him who made, who died for thee, who shall judge: it is to be brought face to face with duty and responsibility, not as an abstract thing but as a living person—'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see

what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am argued with.'

Thought is free, and therefore it is responsible—responsible, not to man, but to God.

TEMPLE CHURCH,
January 31, 1886.

III.

THE IDOLATRY OF WORK.

Habakkuk i. 16.

*They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto
their drag.*

THE text sets before us a particular form of spiritual peril—made such (in large part) by its unexpectedness. The ‘net’ spoken of is the net of toil. The ‘drag’ spoken of is the drag of duty. The danger is that of making an idol of that toil, of offering sacrifice to that duty. The subject of discourse today is, in plain terms, The Idolatry of Work.

‘Six days shalt thou labour,’ said the old and unrepealed statute of the Decalogue, ‘and do all that thou hast to do.’ ‘If any man will not work,’ said one of the most tender-hearted as well as spiritual of Evangelists, ‘neither let him eat.’ It is no exaggeration which speaks even of the divinity of work, taking as its text that marvellous apology of the Saviour for healing a man on the Sabbath, ‘My Father worketh

hitherto, and I work:’ were it otherwise—did the Father or the Son for one moment cease from working—the universe alike of grace and of nature would instantly dissolve itself and fall asunder.

We shall see, as we proceed, that there is something of ambiguity in the word ‘work’—something which enables one Apostle to speak of being ‘justified by works,’ and another Apostle to say, ‘not of works, lest any man should boast.’

But now let us set clearly before ourselves that conception of work, as we have it in this England, and specially in this London, of the last quarter of the 19th century, to which it is no abuse of terms to apply the word idolatry.

We read, a few Sundays ago, in a lesson for the day, of a certain prophetess who judged Israel, that she dwelt under what was known by her name as the palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim, and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. We do not forget that this is an Eastern picture, and that it is a scene laid far in the past, and that the whole description is utterly inapplicable to our quarter of the globe and to our period and stage of civilization. Even within the same period of sacred history we have a modification of this stationary and tranquil ex-

istence: for we read of another prophet, who also judged Israel all the days of his life, that he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpeh, judging in all those places, though his 'return' was to Ramah—for there was his house, and there he permanently judged, and there (monitory words) he built an altar unto the Lord. None the less does it embody an idea, and an idea the absence of which is characteristic, unfavourably characteristic, of our own times. The Deborah of these times is in perpetual motion. The Israelite of this empire comes not up to her for judgment—she must go to him. The seat under the palm-tree is vacant: judgment, if judgment survive, must be carried, cheap and ready, to the doors, and to the very surface of the minds, of a busy and restless people.

We are not yet complaining of the change—we are stating it. The whole conception, the whole expectation, of duty, in our rulers in Church and State, has been reversed and inverted, almost within the memory of the living. To be a clergyman, to be a bishop, such as men now praise and demand, the first condition is, that there be no pause in the activity. The notion of a wise man, full of grace and experience, to whom the presbyter or the layman can resort for counsel in difficulties intellectual or practical,

assured of knowledge, assured of attention, assured of assistance, is obsolete and exploded. The idolatry of work has replaced the thirst for wisdom: there is no time to fill the treasure-house, and there is no time to dispense its stores.

It is said to be so in another great province of the national life. In terms which would be pathetic if they were not in part designed to be playful, we are told that statesmen have no time now for thinking—their thinking stopped with their adolescence, and must now be done for them by the young. There was seriousness enough in the saying to make it a grave comment upon my thesis, *The idolatry of working*. The popular expectation in all rulers is activity in the sense of bustle: they must live in the sight of the sun—for the popular judgment is one and the same concerning things not seen and non-existent.

The consequences of this sort of life are sufficiently mischievous before we bring in upon it the light of Christ and the Gospel. Work done in a hurry needs to be, though it often cannot be, done twice. Hasty legislation brings embarrassment into our administration of justice. Hasty speech, hasty writing, hasty action in politics, may involve irremediable mischief, national or international. We do not say yet where

misfortune ends and fault begins—at least we can see that that idolatry of work which means impatience of repose has its condemnation written upon it by its injurious influences upon the work itself.

I am not applying the text from Habakkuk directly to a man's estimate of his own work. He must be a vain and ignorant creature who can dwell with any complacency upon any one performance of his own—whether speech or book, whether thing done or thing uttered. I am speaking of an idolatry which is in the air—nowhere boasted of, nowhere perhaps avowed, yet exercising a deleterious influence upon the work in one aspect, upon the character in another aspect, of the whole generation so far as it is affected by it.

But now, as the object of any such meditation in this place must be not censure, certainly not satire, but practical and spiritual edifying, let me hasten to bring into view our Lord and His teaching in their correction of this tendency to an idol-worship of work.

And there is this first. He taught us very explicitly that work is not an end but a means. In that, to us (since He spoke it) obvious reflexion lies the whole secret. You remember how St Paul contrasts the two words 'work' and 'fruit:' how he speaks in one place of 'un-

fruitful works:’ how he contrasts in another ‘the works of the flesh’ with ‘the fruit of the Spirit,’ the one ending (or worse than ending) with themselves, the other having in it product and produce, abiding result and perpetual reproduction: how in a third place he combines the two, and says that, if his life is continued (it was then hanging in the balance) this will be to him ‘fruit of work’—he will work on in fruitful working, in work the results of which shall abide unto life eternal. The idolatry of work forgets all this, sacrifices to the net, burns incense to the implement, stops not to enquire what the work was for, and what came of it.

There is this, secondly, in our Lord’s teaching. It not only reminds us in general terms that work may be fruitful or unfruitful, stopping with itself or productive of something; but also that it is essentially of two kinds—it may begin with itself or it may have a beginning behind it—it may be (so to say) its own life, or it may be the manifestation of a life prior and antecedent. When the Jews asked Him upon earth that question of questions, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ He answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.’ Certainly He did not represent to them that a life of indolent piety or dreaming mysti-

cism is the life which He would commend. But He did say this, as the lesson most urgently needed—that to work there must be life, and that to work what God counts work there must be spiritual life—that life of which He Himself is at once the spring and the motive. The idolatry of work forgets this; would start the workman on his routine of duty without any thing having passed first—without any direct spiritual dealing with Him whose workmen we are—and thus in the condition of persons ignorant alike whence they came and whither they go—ignorant of the origin of all being, ignorant therefore, by necessary consequence, of its meaning, its motive, and its destination.

A third thought should be added—akin to, yet distinct from, the two former. It is this. Not the work, but the workman, is the all-important thing. The work dies, perishes (in some sense, not in every sense) with the doing: the workman lives—performs as a hireling his day, and then joins the innumerable company of workmen, of whom it has been said one by one, ‘Call the labourers, and give them their hire.’ What God looks for is the man; the man qualified to do the day’s work by the possession of a life inward before it is outward, and then coming back to the Author and Giver of both, qualified for that everlasting rest in God, which is the

immortality of an unhasting yet no longer wasting and no longer exhausting activity. Work, as such, must die with itself. No work done on this changeful earth's surface keeps its form for more than a generation. It may have a longer life, but it is by being gone on with by others, in different bodies, amidst different circumstances, probably altogether in different shapes, from those of the original (if any one can be called the original) workman. Far more probably the work quite dies. How few buildings, how few books, how few institutions, out of the countless thousands formed each year upon this solid earth's surface, have an existence into the next century! New men new minds—new tastes, new wants, new standards. Humbling thought to human pride, 'When his breath goeth forth, he returns again to his earth, and then all his thoughts perish'—his thoughts, his plans, his schemes, his achievements, his victories. 'His thoughts perish'—but not he himself—not the thinker, the toiler, the workman.

So that all depends not upon what he wrought, but upon what he was. This thought is the salutary leveller of apparent inequalities—the salutary iconoclast of idolized exploits—the salutary reminder of the one real thing among multitudes of seeming—perish the work, live the workman! See that, say that, now, and it shall

give humility to the working, and with it meaning, and with it dignity, and with it immortality.

Even now we are made aware by a thousand experiences, sorrowful and joyous, how much greater is the man than his work. Not the busy bustler, not the irritable imperious chief of a department, not the discoverer of the secret of perpetual motion, is the man to whom other men turn for guidance—certainly not for comfort. His work may be marvellous in quantity—probably not in quality: men may stand amazed at his despatch, at his industry, at his countless hours of labour: they may admire the workman for his work—but it ends there.

Meanwhile some humble toiler at a lower and meaner desk—some subordinate whom no one takes count of—who ‘setteth not by himself’ and ‘never answereth again’—he is the workman in whom the Spirit of God is; and because he is so, the day may come when some Nicodemus shall visit him, by night it may be, in a cloudy and dark hour of distress or remorse, asking of him the way of wisdom, or opening to him some secret of the soul. Those are the works that live when the workman is gone back to God: for they are works that alter lives, change souls, and add to the church such as shall be saved.

We seem to have two words to add to that

which has been spoken: and the first of these addresses itself to men—in this church there must be many such—who complain, sometimes complain bitterly, that no work comes to them—they would idolize it perhaps too much if it did.

The words of Jesus Christ, telling you how wide, in His sight, is the compass of the word 'work,' how it takes in soul as well as body, souls of others as well as our own, have a cheering sound in them for you. What! no work—while lives are so wretched, homes so squalid, souls so disconsolate, all around you? No work—when a generation, fertile, inventive, in all that is good as in all that is evil, opens to you such a boundless vista of possibilities, if not (in the highest form) of evangelizing, then at least in the lower, yet still Christian, still divine, form of civilizing and humanizing? No work—when there are men, men of birth, men of culture, men of refinement—yes, but more than this, family men, men with sons and daughters naturally desirous of good society and bright surroundings, actually taking up their homes in the unlovely East of London, for the sake of working there, still more of being men there, working men without ostentation, affectation, or assumption, amongst, not beside, still less above, the poor 'hardly bestead and hungry' working people

of that distant, almost foreign, coast and border of the great city? Why not go to the work which will not come to you? Why not gird yourself to the very work of God, till the work of man occupies and too much absorbs you—the very work, I say, of God Himself, who waits not the glad response of congenial souls, but goes forth and ‘seeketh such to worship Him?’

The other closing word is addressed, very respectfully, and only in the tone of suggestive sympathy, to those honoured members of this unique congregation, who, much against their will, are being swept into the vortex of an engrossing, an overwhelming, an almost killing occupation, and are in danger, if there be a word of truth in the Bible, of practically living without God in the world. I would not speak to such men one word of my own. But may I remind them how many great men of their own profession, in times now historical and in the time now present, have nevertheless found it possible, in the midst of equal distractions of business, to remember and to honour and to worship and even actively to serve Him in whom, with our will or without it, we must all of us live and move and have our being? No work of this world, no lawful and honourable work like theirs, ever suffered for not being allowed to swallow up the spirit in the mind, the soul in the intel-

lect. The idolatry of work may be struggled against. God Himself may be called in to take the place of the Moloch that would kindle his godless fires in the sanctuary made for Another. Christ Himself led a busier life than any of us. From an early dawn till a late evening teaching and healing, between them, claimed His entire strength, all His working hours. What then? He redeemed the time by rising before day, seeking the lonely mountain, and awaiting there, in deep blessed communion, the summons of the dawn, 'All men seek for Thee.' Let the workman be, for you, more than the work. Let the preparation of the heart be felt, by you, to be indispensable to the free and grand sweep of the intellect. Count the day lost which has not had its sacred, its sanctifying, five minutes of early devotion. Let no idolatry of work rob you of the recollection how much greater, how much costlier, how much more influential, is the workman.

TEMPLE CHURCH,

July 5, 1885.

IV.

THE IDOLATRY OF NOVELTY.

Acts xvii. 21.

All the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Revelation xxi. 5.

Behold, I make all things new.

THE one text exhibits to us in a lively picture the working of a great idolatry. The other text shows us the abolition of that idolatry by the satisfaction of the want of which it is the expression. Together they present to us the two sides of our subject, which is, The Idolatry of Novelty.

It cannot be denied that there is in all lives—probably not least in the busiest and the loftiest—an element of dulness. This is only to say that there must be routine in every life which is either active or useful; and that the life which is neither active nor useful is sure to have a routine of its own, a monotony of mere

indolence or mere self-indulgence, of all monotonies the most irksome and the most fatiguing. It is not only the life described in one of the most awful chapters of the Bible, the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy—the life of ‘siege and straitness,’ the life ‘hanging in doubt,’ ‘fearing day and night,’ with ‘trembling heart, failing eyes, and sorrow of mind’—it is not this life alone which ‘says in the morning, Would God it were even! and at even, Would God it were morning!’ The prophecy of the great lawgiver is fulfilled day by day in fashionable homes and trifling occupations and idle habits. The weariness of the old, the thirst and the hunger for something new, is one of the plagues and curses of fallen nature; and though it might be fantastic to call this an ‘idolatry,’ or indeed a worship of any kind, for which it lacks the effort and the energy, it yet points very strongly the moral of the want and the destitution which in higher and nobler natures works itself out in more strenuous if not more satisfying enterprises of change and variety.

The Athenians of the first text were not mere gossips or newsmongers. The first sound of the words does them some injustice. Their idolatry of novelty by no means exhausted itself in inventing or embellishing or retailing scandalous or mischievous stories against the great

men of their city, or against humbler neighbours 'dwelling securely by them.' Their treatment of St Paul shows this. He was not a man of sufficient notoriety or sufficient importance to attract the attention of the mere tattler or scandalmonger. It was because he raised grave questions, going to the very root of the national and individual life—it was because, with a spirit provoked within him by the sight of an idol-ridden city, he lost no opportunity of discussing, not only in the synagogue, before an audience tolerant of such denunciations, but in the market-place every day with anybody and everybody who encountered him, matters deeper than philosophy, touching the very soul of the life and the very Object of worship—it was because they heard from his lips what they took to be the preaching of new deities, amongst which they caught by frequent repetition the names—names of divine persons, as they thought—of 'Jesus' and 'Resurrection'—therefore it was that these idolaters of novelty were attracted by him, and thought it worth while to bring him before the religious tribunal of the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine which is talked by thee is?' 'This new doctrine'—because, as St Luke adds in the text, their great interest was in the hearing and telling of 'anything at all new.'

Brethren, the idolatry of novelty has a wide range. There are those amongst us whose idolatry of novelty never rises to the level of the Athenian. In vain, all in vain, for them, the preaching in ten thousand churches of Jesus and the Resurrection, even could that doctrine be for once new. Enough for them the last new fashion in dress, the last new horror in the police-courts, the last new tragedy or comedy in the newspapers, the last new mystery or the last new misadventure in society. Not even in haste or jest does the question ever fall from their lips, 'What is truth?' Not for one moment do they pause in the purposeless circuit of their trifling to hear of the most useful invention in art or the most marvellous discovery in science, to enter intelligently into the progress of a negotiation which may mean peace or war for their country, or to lay to heart some act of heroism or some sacrifice of devotion which for the moment brings heaven down to earth or lifts earth itself to heaven.

This sort of idolatry of novelty, this base vulgar grovelling curiosity, is of no value whatever beyond the evidence which it affords, more than half by negatives, to the instinct which is in all of us that this is not our rest.

It may be enough to say of this worship of novelty, that, as often as not, perhaps (if we

knew all) in nine cases out of ten, it is but another name for the worship of falsehood. No trouble whatever is taken by the caterers for this table to make sure whether its supply has anything more in it than a germ, if even a germ, of fact however worthless. Those who live in a far-off county of England find day after day that their morning is spent in shuddering over some particular horror detailed in the local newspaper which will be contradicted by the arrival of the soberer or better informed London paper in the afternoon. And certainly the London papers have no exemption from the charge of living, some of them, upon the assertion of scandals of which half the employment of others is the contradiction.

But in itself, even where 'news' and 'lies' are not synonyms, how mean, how paltry, how unworthy of an immortal being, is this form of the idolatry of novelty!

Let us try it in another and higher region—the region of art and literature. There the idolatry of novelty becomes the worship of originality. And need I say what the effort to be original becomes in the hands of the commonplace? Need I speak of the exaggerations, the contortions, the burlesques of the would-be originalities of landscape and portrait-painting? Need I speak of the affectations of the so-called

original in poetry—its unnatural conceptions, its barbarous idioms, its unintelligible and almost unpronounceable oracles? Alas, the rage for novelty does not exhaust itself in the province of art. It is the condition of success in the historian, to invert received opinions of character, and to rewrite history itself into contraries. To apply the phrase of the Book of Proverbs, ‘They sleep not except they have changed a record, and their sleep is gone from them unless they have taken away a character.’ The idolatry of novelty in the reader exacts this sacrifice from the writer. But the mischief stops not even here. The preacher himself is tried by his originality. It is not enough, it is not the thing wanted, that he unfold to men the Scriptures—that he preach the Word of God, and bring it home with the energy of a profound conviction to his audience. The question is, not whether he is true, but whether he is original; and there is no eccentricity of idea, and no vagary of doctrine, and no oddity or levity of expression, which will not find a hearing and (as the phrase is) draw a congregation, by the mere fact that it is novel, and, however loose in thought or slipshod in language, it is at least a relief from the monotony of ‘the faith once delivered.’

A cruel trial this for the weak vain man, who is miserable without an audience, and must

purchase it at any cost. Yet how preferable any dulness to this sort of brilliancy! Few men have nothing to tell us, would they but speak that they know, and speak it according to the measure of their powers. But no taking thought can add one cubit to the stature. The little man can only make himself ridiculous by affecting greatness. The 'tall man on tiptoe' may simulate, but he cannot really emulate, the 'giant in repose.' And it is hard that the prevailing idolatry of novelty should even tempt a man away from that simplicity which is the line not more of truth than of beauty for such as can 'judge a righteous judgment.'

The subject widens before us, and we must lose no more time in bringing it to its practical application in the one higher province still. The Athenian developement of the worship of novelty will be our guide here.

We can scarcely wonder that the fanciful mythology of the earlier days of that wonderful people should have sunk, before the Christian era, from a beautiful though insubstantial faith into a cold and half-conscious hypocrisy—a miserable form for the many, a political expedient for the few. Philosophers and statesmen had long ceased to worship. But the former dreamed and the latter acted in agreement thus far—that a thorough iconoclasm would be dan-

gerous, if not to the welfare of the people, at least to the tranquillity of the state. That altar of which St Paul availed himself with such skill in his address on Mars' Hill, 'To the Unknown God,' was probably the only one which had any honest votary in the then population of Athens. Agnosticism may have a positive as well as a negative creed for those who have no better. St Paul treated it as merely an anonymous altar, just waiting for the inscription which he came to write upon it.

Those Athenians might well have an open ear for the preacher of a new divinity. This was but to confess, what was no secret by this time, that their anonymous altar was still standing, and that they waited to worship till it had a name. For them the idolatry of novelty was their hope and their religion.

Alas, brethren, that we should have come round again to those days! Alas, ten times alas, that it should be practically for the same reason! After all these centuries we too are left with an anonymous altar, and the worship of English hearts is offered once again at the shrine of an unknown, an avowedly unknowable, God. There is not an arrival of a so-called new apostle, there is not an importation of a so-called new divinity, for which this modern Athens has not at least one of its ears open.

There is no pretence and no burlesque of a new commerce with the invisible, which cannot hold its *séances* in darkened chambers with a certainty of a sufficient gathering and a great probability of a crowd of awe-struck questioners outside. There is no audacity of new doubting, whether it assails the evidences of revelation, or whether it offers some alternative of accommodating and adjusting compromise, which has no hearing from the congregation—must I add, no mouth-piece in the pulpit? We are told that there is at least one English Mohammedan, and that there are many English Buddhists, in Christian London at this moment, and in the midst of the so-styled Christianity of London. We are told that some one has dared to say, within the Christian Church of London, that Buddha himself is second only (if second) to Jesus Christ in morals, and superior to Christ Himself in this, that he never claimed for himself divinity.

The idolatry of novelty can no further go—at least not while ‘he who now letteth will let’—but soon he shall be taken out of the way, and then shall ‘the lawless one’ be revealed—to be unmasked and consumed in his season by the One mightier.

We will turn now to the other and better half of the subject, and try to show, in a few concluding sentences, how considerately, how

mercifully, our Lord Jesus Christ, and His Heavenly Father our Lord God, enters into that natural want of something new, which lies at the root of the worship of the ugly idol which we have sought to characterize in this Sermon.

Do you suppose that Jesus Christ, God in Christ, is unaware, as of the many woes and crimes of earth, so of this particular feature of it, and specially of this earth of England and London—its flatness, its staleness, its dulness, its monotony, as it is felt certainly in all but its ten thousand upper lives—and what are they among the teeming multitudes which make up the population of either?

There is nothing which more quickens and stimulates my sympathy, as I walk up and down the back streets (more especially) of London, than the thought of the countless thousands of lonely people, ill off, if not quite destitute, who live behind those window-blinds and in those interminable rows of not squalid but most unlovely dwellings which stretch for miles and miles outside the more fortunate because more interesting and less dead-alive terraces and squares of the central city. When I think of the mere weariness of the life of some elderly or middle-aged seamstress or needlewoman of this busy and selfish London—by no means the

most pitiable, except in this one aspect of dulness, of all the sorts and conditions of London living—I can almost forgive the idolatry of novelty, and feel that God must have somewhere in Himself and in His Son Jesus Christ a balm for it and a cure for it, certainly a sympathy with it, as one of the real trials of His banished but not forgotten children.

And I find that balm, that cure, certainly that sympathy, on every page of the Gospel. What is the second text of this morning? ‘He that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I make all things new.’ The very feeling—the very want—the very sense of monotony which has made impatient man set up this paltry idol of novelty—is here provided for by God Himself saying, ‘Behold I make (not a few things, but) all things new.’

Yes, you will say—somewhere and some day, in that visionary region, in that far-off unrealizable world, of which St John’s Apocalypse tells.

Well—despise not the world to come. Think not scorn of that pleasant land. It will be very real and very beautiful to those who (as our Saviour once said) shall be counted worthy to obtain it.

But let me tell you of a nearer ‘making all things new.’ Let me tell you of it first in a

word of St John, and then finally in a word of St Paul.

There are two ways of fulfilling the promise of renovation. One is by the renewal of the thing itself—the other is by the renewal of the eye that views it. If the one is the promise of the text, the other is the promise elsewhere alike of St John and St Paul. It is very delightful to think of a coming time of refreshing and restoration, of which all God's prophets have spoken, and which shall renew the face of this weary earth with more than that primeval beauty of which the first Book of the Bible says, 'God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good.' It is very delightful to hear St Paul say that the whole creation—he expressly distinguishes it from the Christian firstfruits—shall at last be delivered from its long bondage of decay and corruption into the liberty of the glory—the liberty which shall attend the glory—of the children of God. All this, though we scarcely know in which direction to look for it, is the expansion or one application of the saying, 'Behold, I make all things new.'

But it is more practical, and belongs to this very present, to speak of a change, not so much in the object of sight, as in the eye which views it.

St John has been telling his people at

Ephesus that he writes them no new commandment—only the old commandment which they had from the beginning. He has no new burden to lay upon them—he has no new divinity or deity to set forth to them: only the old thing, the old Gospel—it was almost old by the end of the first century when he wrote to them—the Saviour whom they knew so well and loved so dearly: he had no new thing to write to them.

He thinks again. Perhaps the weariness of long use may have crept in even upon them. Perhaps they may be saying, The time is long—the wheels tarry—all things are as they were when first, almost fifty years ago, the Evangelist St Paul arrived in Ephesus. He feels for this feeling, and he thinks again. Yes, he says, ‘I have a new commandment to give you—which thing is true, in Him, and in you.’ In Him. Because the fountain of life is in Him, and that fountain is ever fresh, ever flowing—yea, as He said Himself, springing, bounding, leaping up into life eternal. And in you. Because each day of it is a new day: the mercies are new, as well as sure, every morning: each day the day-spring arises with a fresh illumination—each day the Sun of righteousness rises newly upon you with healing in His wings. Thus the old commandment is new also. There is no dulness, no flatness, no staleness, no weariness, there.

‘He that sitteth upon the throne saith already, Behold, I make all things new.’

And St Paul says, in the same sense, ‘Old things are passed away’—the old life, the old gloom, the old sins, the old dull routine, the old dead monotony. ‘Behold’—you may see, you may feel it—‘all things’ (or, according to the Revised Version, ‘they,’ the old things themselves) ‘are become new.’

We have all known in ourselves how the same objects, sea, sky, cloud, landscape—home itself and its inmates—the loved face, the letter from the dearest one—may look dull or look lively, look beautiful or look ugly, according to the state of the mind that views it. It looks quite different when a sin is strong in us, from that which it looked when we had just risen from prayer, and the very skin of the face shone from the reflexion of the King in His beauty.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by Thee;
Cheerless is the day’s return,
Till Thy mercy’s beams I see—

then all is altered. Then the old commandment looks new. Then the heaven and the earth are new for me. Then He that sitteth upon the throne hath said, Behold, I make all things new—yea (as St Paul interprets) the old things themselves.

Brethren, if this, or any part of this, be true, we have the riddle of our subject read. The instinct of curiosity is strong in us. We are tempted to make novelty an idol—to seek satisfaction in the news of the day, in the ‘novels’ of the season—in the discoveries of science, in the novelties of art—in the latest arrival, so styling itself, from the world unseen, in the most recent ‘reading’ of the Bible, in the last new ‘view’ of the last new teacher—in anything or in any one that can change the old face of the old earth and the old heaven, and say to us, I have a message unto thee, O man, from the unfathomed abyss, from the untelescoped sky. This is our temptation. If we yield to it, we are as far as ever from our satisfaction. Worlds multiply before us: mystery lies beyond mystery, and still beyond: new divinities arrive by ship and railway—‘they chose new gods, then was war in the gates’—‘gods whom they knew not, gods that came newly up:’ ‘of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.’

‘O that they were wise!’ For this impatience of the old, for this thirst for the new, God has provided. ‘The secret of the Lord’—what would curiosity itself more?—‘is with them that fear Him.’ There is no dulness and no sameness to them who can look out straight and

steadily towards the heaven where God dwells. Old scenes, old friends, old employments, old truths, take a new colour from that converse : the old commandment itself is become new for those on whose heart love writes it : they wait not for the consummation—it is theirs now—when He that sitteth upon the throne shall say, and fulfil the saying, Behold, I make all things new.

TEMPLE CHURCH,

July 26, 1885.

V.

THE DRIFTING LIFE, AND ITS OPPOSITE.

Acts xxvii. 15.

And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

John vi. 21.

Then they willingly received Him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

THE two texts are two pictures—they are also two parables.

In the one, 'a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy' is caught, in coasting along Crete, by a tempestuous wind which it cannot face: it can only give way, and let itself be driven. That ship has on board, in sailors, soldiers, prisoners, and passengers, no fewer (according to the received text) than two hundred three-score and sixteen souls—among them, one precious life, that of the Apostle Paul, who is on his way to Rome for trial. In the hour of peril

he becomes the leading spirit. He foresees, he warns, he animates, he sets the example of composure, of good sense, of courage: had he been listened to, shipwreck would have been averted; when shipwreck is inevitable, he does what can be done to mitigate its worst horrors. The text takes the particular moment at which, caught by a sudden wind, blowing down upon them from the highlands of Crete, the only thing they can do is to yield to the storm and let the ship drift.

In the other text the scene is laid very differently. There the sea of Galilee is the water traversed by a much smaller vessel, and the peril, which has been great—for that inland sea is proverbially capricious and dangerous—is now in the past: for One has entered the boat—entered it walking on the sea—who can say to the roughest wind, ‘Peace, be still;’ and the effect of His presence has on this occasion been a second miracle—‘immediately the ship,’ which was but now in mid sea, ‘was at the land whither they went.’

Brethren, those two pictures are also two parables. These two ships are two lives. One is typified by the words, ‘caught,’ ‘giving way,’ and ‘driven:’ the other is no helpless plaything of the elements—it is making for a certain shore; it knows its destination, and it reaches it.

I. The drifting life is our first subject. Its name is legion. It is not the only life of the human being—but it is the life of hundreds of thousands. ‘Drifting’ is its superscription. Caught by the Euroclydon of chance and change, of accident and circumstance, it gives way to it, and so is driven. It drifts.

Its very framework and setting—its external condition, its employment, its occupation, its profession—has perhaps been accident. It had no real start, no regular setting out, no definite intention of being or doing this or that, no direction from the will, and no education (properly so called) for the character. It had a home, and it went to school, it did its lessons, and ate and drank, and it grew up, and it took its chance, and here it is. The outward life drifted.

If this were all, something might be said of its quiet submission to a higher guidance—human guidance or even divine. But this is not all.

The life which we are describing is not only passive in the sense of submission—it is passive also in departments where it is death not to be active.

For example, there is such a thing as drifting into associations, drifting into habits, drifting into a course of conduct. How else can we describe nine-tenths of the companion-

ships, nine-tenths of the attachments, nine-tenths of the marriages, which may almost be said to have the life itself in their keeping? Where was purpose, where was principle, where (we might almost ask) was choice or will itself in any of these? Chance did it. Chance threw that boy in the way of that other boy: he never asked himself whether the companionship was good or evil: he scarcely asked himself whether he liked it: he just drifted into it, and the end of it was mischief, vice, or a gaol. Chance threw that young man twice or thrice into the company of one whose utter emptiness of heart, mind, and soul ought to have repelled and disgusted him: but no, the ship was caught, and we let her drive—and a frivolous, profitless, utterly worldly married life and home was the consequence.

Drifting is the explanation of half the personal habits which make a good or a bad life. Letting alone is another word for it. Habits are only tricks on a large scale: every one knows how easy these are to fall into, how difficult to get rid of: what else are those bad habits which become the plague and the torment, and the executioner too, of the moral life—habits of temper, habits of speech, habits of thought—sloth, debt, intemperance, profaneness, immorality—what else are they but negligences at

first, things thought not worth attending to, so trivial, so immaterial, so easily dropped at any moment if they should go too far or become troublesome? we drift into them, and before we know it, they become a Euroclydon to us in their turn.

There are positive habits and negative. You let your morning prayer pass one morning—you were late, you were hurried, you could not help it: you never meant to give it up, you never doubted the duty—but you found it more difficult the next day, you found excuses for the omission more plentiful the third day—you just drifted out of the good habit, as you drifted into the bad one.

There are habits of the mind as well as of the life. Opinion is a habit of the mind—not least on the highest subjects. Faith itself is a mental habit—faith, and its opposite. But how few are they, by comparison, who carefully and earnestly form these mental habits. The old philosophic historian said with deep insight for all time—‘How unpainstaking for most men is the pursuit of truth! they turn by preference to the thing ready to hand.’ Yes, they drift into opinion, whether concerning fact or truth. The last book they read, the last review they glanced at, the last man they sat by, the last guess or gibe that fell on their ear—that shall be their

Euroclydon for the week or for the day—they strake sail before it, and were driven.

Reflect for a moment upon your reasons for thinking this, for believing that. ‘Be ready,’ St Peter says, ‘to answer when men ask you a reason for the hope that is in you’—can we obey that precept? Must we not say, most of us, I drifted into my faith—it is the religion of my home and of my country—I was born thus? If I had been born something else, no doubt I should have been that, and not this, today.

Is not the same thing true, to a great extent, of the various eccentricities of opinion—departures more or less serious from the received Christianity—which it is thought no presumption, in these days, to cherish, and no impertinence to avow? Men drift into them. Some one has said so, some one who affects originality, some one who has the reputation of a thinker: I never stayed to hear the other side: I never thought it my duty to examine the new doctrine any more than the old: therefore I am at the mercy of any Euroclydon which catches me—they threw out the old freight, strake sail, and drifted.

Very sad, sometimes, is the spectacle of this kind of drifting. One who set out well, from a Christian home, trained in Christian habits, is now vacillating or oscillating. One who was

running well is hindered in mid course: some gust of ill influence is upon him—we scarcely know from which quarter it blew, over which headland of Crete it came down upon the helpless vessel: the man was so careless, so casual, in his reading, so venturesome, so reckless, in his companionships, so little conscious apparently of the responsibility of thinking, of the inseparableness of opinion and action, of the tremendous issues involved in belief and unbelief, that no wonder he was caught by the first blast of false doctrine: at all events, though we know not whence it came, we can see too well whither it goes: we can see the man drifting: less and less does any old truth hold or keep him; more and more does he admit the new, the newer, the newest suggestion into his company and into his confidence: between two sights of him he has become a doubter, between the next two a caviller, between the two next a scoffer: he is drifting, drifting, drifting—and unless God in His mercy arrests him by one of those fearful shocks which storm the very life, he will go from bad to worse, till he falls into the quicksand from which there is no footstep backward.

This is the end of drifting—but which of us can be quite sure that he may not be at the beginning of it?

We have sometimes thought that our own

generation, this closing part of it most of all, was specially marked with this superscription of drifting. Never were temptations to it so rife—never were the checks upon it so feeble. Unbelief is in the air. The talk of the day is agnostic. It either knows that nothing is real but the visible, or (which comes to much the same thing) it does not know, nor can anyone else know for certain, that anything else is so. What must be the effect of this upon morals? A general shaking of all confidence in judgment and eternity, what can this lead to but a relaxation of the salutary fear which was the other side of the saving hope?

Young men discarding, or holding in vaguest suspense, any definite expectation of the judgment-seat of Christ naturally lie at loose anchor as to the necessity (from any motive but the very precarious one of self-interest) of morality, of veracity, of honesty itself. Thus they lay themselves open to possibilities of wrongdoing which were impossibilities to the average virtue of a generation ago. Frauds multiply, thefts multiply, suspicious disappearances multiply, perjuries multiply, robberies become murders, murders become suicides: there is an epidemic of both, a contagion and an infection of both, not on the Continent only, where a notorious ruin of faith may account for it, but in England

also: I trace them up to the habit of drifting—the drifting faith idly, lazily ‘wishing for the day,’ and the drifting life making merchandise of the ‘neither moon nor stars for many days appearing.’ This is the end of it—the end, and the consequence too.

These are grave charges to bring against rational and responsible beings. But we hear them without resentment, because they affect us all less or more: indeed they attribute to us faults which have a show at least of apology, in the docility and the modesty and the self-mistrust which they seem to bear on the face of them.

Stay, brethren, before you lay these flatteries to your bosom, and anticipate the day of which Sunday and Sacrament, Church and Bible, soul and conscience, tell, when, alone and without companions, each one of us must give account of himself to God. Can it be sufficient for us in that day of strict and solemn account to say, I was the creature of accident—I could not ‘face the wind’ of custom and persuasion and powerful circumstance—independence was impossible for me—the forepart stuck fast, the hinder part was broken—I could but accept, I could but take on trust, I could but yield, and drift?

Made in God’s image, of reason at least, and

free will, and self-management, and single being, we must be, for ourselves and by ourselves, that which we are, whether in conduct or in character or in faith or in life. Is there no other life for us than this life of drifting? Is there no kind of life, which, without arrogance and without presumption, without affecting to be that which it is not, or to expect to be that which it cannot be, shall yet be able to reckon concerning itself both with man and God, shall have its own reason for believing, its own scope and aim of being, its own rudder and compass for the voyage, its own safe arrival at the shore whither it intends and resolves to go?

2. Thus we reach the second text and the second picture and the second parable—that which shows us the disciples crossing the sea of Galilee through wind and storm, terrified in the midst of it first by the absence and then by the apparition of their Master, then calmed by His voice of reassurance, receiving Him into their ship, and straightway finding themselves at the land whither they went.

The opposite of a life of drifting is obviously a life of aim, of purpose, of directness. A life which goes, not anywhere, but somewhither. A life with a terminus, with a destination, with a haven. A life possessing both helm and pilot, a controlling hand and a guiding will.

Such a life may be, and yet be earthly. A business life may have, in terms at least, all these conditions. A life of ambition—a political life—a life of study—a life of letters—a scientific life—possibly a life of pleasure—it is just possible—may have its object well defined, and earnestly kept to—it might be quite untrue to say of it that it ‘struck sail’ under any sudden impulse of chance or circumstance, or could ever be described (within its own limits) as driven or drifting.

Perhaps not—but how when we take into view the whole of being—eternity, as well as time? How then?

The subject is wide—we must shorten it. We want to know what is the security against drifting, when we take in two worlds. And we find it in the words, ‘They received Him into the ship.’

No life is safe from drifting unless it has religion in it. Neither prudence, nor good sense, nor sound judgment, nor a strong will, can prevent the ship, which is the life, from being caught by some Euroclydon, and driven helpless before it.

Many perhaps would grant this, and then give their own definition to the word religion—make it mean principle, or make it mean seriousness, or make it mean morality—and so take

the whole point out of it in its application to the subject.

The disciples in the second text took a Person—not a thing, not an idea, not a principle, but a Person—into their vessel, and found His presence the secret of a safe voyage and a quick arrival. Brethren, it is a true parable. We are so made as to want, not some thing, but some One. When St Paul has just spoken of the Gospel as ‘the mystery of godliness,’ he goes on with the personal relative ‘who.’ And when he speaks in another Epistle of ‘the mystery of God,’ he goes on to explain the expression by adding, ‘even Christ.’ To receive Christ into the ship is the one safeguard against a precarious, an unmanly, and a dangerous drifting.

We know that the phrase is often used ignorantly or used mischievously. To receive Christ is sometimes made a fanciful, fantastic, or fanatical precept. It suggests to some minds a moment of forced or exaggerated feeling, to be followed perhaps by a life of inconsistent conduct, false self-complacency, or blank and black disappointment. Be sure that we do not so intend it. With us it is the expression for a calm and sober and sacred transaction, which is to set the life upon a new footing of hope and happiness—to define its aim, to steady its course, to settle its principle, to fix its character—not

to make terms with God as to its past, present, or future, but deliberately and solemnly to accept the Gospel as a revelation of divine forgiveness, fresh and free as heaven's light and air, leading on to a new kind of life not so much in the things to be done as in the spirit of doing them, and enduing with a strength not its own the will enfeebled by sinning and the soul enchained to the visible.

This new life, to be lived, must be entered upon. With no display and no proclamation and no signal of itself, beyond what men may chance to take knowledge of by its consequence in an improved temper and a sweetened disposition and a more charitable tone and a kindlier converse, the change is within. The ship has in it now a Divine Presence, and it goes smoothly and steadily on its way. All things fall now into their proper place. All things are seen now in their just proportions. The man who lived once for himself lives now for others and for Another. In the same degree he is happier, brighter, more concentrated, more effective, more attractive, than he used to be. Already by faith he is at the land whither he goes. Sooner or later, soon at the latest, he will have reached it, and the welcome on the eternal shore, the glad 'Well done, good and faithful,' will be uttered by the same Voice which, in

moments of sorrow, perplexity, and darkness, has again and again animated and cheered him on the voyage.

This is a faint and poor description of the spiritual act—for there are acts of the soul as well as of the body—to which we would earnestly and lovingly invite all who have not yet done it. He of whom we speak as the Person to be dealt with is already at hand and within hearing. In Him already we live and move. He gives to all of us life and breath and all things. He cannot therefore—it is St Paul's argument at Athens—be far from any one of us. We, in heart and will, may have erred and strayed from Him: but even in the land of our self-sought exile we may still speak of a home and a Father ours once, ours already, ours of right if not yet in enjoyment: even there, even thence, we may arise and go to one already our Father: we know already His face and His dwelling-place—it is the face of love, it is the dwelling-place of happiness.

One hour, one moment, may do that we ask of you—one rising of the heart, one movement of the will, one soul's prayer, one cry of the spirit—and eternity itself will not exhaust its consequences. Then no more aimless purposeless helpless drifting. This holy season will have witnessed the placing of the life upon a

sure and firm footing. The Divine Father, the Divine Son, the Divine Spirit, one God, shall have become your God for ever and ever, your guide unto death. A little while, and the voyage shall be ended: a little while, and the ship shall be at the land whither it went. ‘Then are they glad, because they are at rest—and so He bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.’

TEMPLE CHURCH,
December 9, 1888.

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,
May 26, 1889.

VI.

IMPOSSIBLE ARMOUR.

1 Samuel xvii. 39.

I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them.

THE armour was good armour. Sword, and helmet, and coat of mail, each was faultless—true metal, excellent temper, perfect workmanship. And it was a great honour to wear it: it was the king's own, the king lent it, and the king put it on. What was wanting? The young wearer had no armour of his own: he was fresh from his cottage home and his shepherd life: he had come to carry a present of loaves and cheeses to his soldier brothers, and had lighted upon an exciting moment in the camp of Israel, which had stirred his spirit into an enthusiasm of faith and courage: he could not bear to have his country and his country's God defied with impunity by the soulless bulk of a vainglorious Philistine: he had even ventured to say, 'Let no man's heart fail because of him'—to say to

the king, 'Thy servant will go and fight with him'—and he has neither helmet nor sword. Both are at his service: the king catches the infection of this young ardour, believes in the mission, and will speed it on its way.

At first there is compliance. To refuse such honour seems ungracious or seems impossible. 'Saul armed David with his armour—put a helmet of brass upon his head—armed him with a coat of mail: David girded the sword upon the armour, and assayed to go'—assayed, but went not. Why? 'He had not proved it.' 'David said to Saul, I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them—and he put them off him.' Anything better than the unproved. Better no armour than the awkward encumbrance of the unwonted and the untried: better the old staff, so familiar to the hand: better the old sling, tried in a thousand feats of eye and arm: better the old shepherd's scrip, with its five carefully selected smooth stones from the brook—better anything accustomed, anything proved by use and found serviceable, than the showiest, most beautiful, most perfect, of novelties. The king armed the young patriot with his own armour, but David put it off him, saying, 'I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them.'

Brethren, there is a struggle, there is a warfare, there is a battle, before all and each of

us—some are already in the heat of it—of which the text is the appropriate and the transparent parable, and upon which a few plain words spoken this morning may be found by some seasonable, and, I will hope, helpful. It has two chief departments—but we need not stay to separate them very carefully—the faith, and the life. For each of these there is an equipment—call it preparation, call it education, or what you will: only remember that it is not all preliminary—it is lifelong, it is daily, it is new every morning. If it were not so, for a large part of this congregation the subject would be unpractical—consolatory, or melancholy, as the case might be, but matter only for retrospect—congratulatory or regretful, but vocal only to the memory. It is not so. We will hasten then into the interpretation of the parable, carrying, I trust, all hearts with us.

The armour which Saul offered to David was excellent armour, infinitely superior to anything which it sought to replace. Indeed of armour David had nothing. The one defect in the offer was not intrinsic, but relative. David had not proved it. Therefore, good as it was in itself, good as it was for the use of the owner, it was of no use and no value to him.

Most young men have some one who offers them his armour. In these days the school-

master is abroad even for the poorest. In all days the parent, for better or worse, is present in the home. The Church is, or ought to be, at hand everywhere, with its instructing and educating influences. All these may be described as offering to arm the young mind and the young soul for the battle of that life which has death in front of it.

It is scarcely a reflexion upon this offer to say that it largely resembles Saul's offer to David. We hardly see how it could be otherwise. Parents and teachers must educate out of their own stores of experience. They cannot and they ought not to ask the child or the pupil what he has, and advise him to make the best of it. To a large extent he must be 'clothed upon' with faiths and principles to be taken at first on trust. With the most careful and the most skilful endeavour to draw out the thought that is there, and to put to it the new thought, in a form exactly fitting it and therefore ready to be made a part of the mind instead of a piece or a patch upon it—and this, or something like this, is true teaching—it cannot always be done: education cannot always be carried on in this minute and individual way: numbers alone would make it impossible, even if the educating idea were always thus intelligent and thus active. The true and the

false, the right and the wrong, as the educator himself regards each, must be broadly and positively stated, even though the statement may anticipate the experience and therefore to a large extent the intelligence of the hearer. Any attempt to lay down rules of conduct in circumstances necessarily future, or to warn against evils not yet developed, whether because the age for them is not yet, or because the opportunity is not yet, must more or less partake of the character of arming David with Saul's coat of mail: the person addressed cannot yet have proved it, and yet the instructor durst not take the responsibility of deferring into an indefinite future the counsel or the warning which may at any moment become vital to the hearer when the voice which now speaks will be silent. Yet all the time he knows that he is uttering that which can scarcely be impressive, because it necessarily lacks the personal proving.

What pains ought to be taken to enable the receiver to prove everything—so to bring down and bring home the instruction as that it may be, at least in its germ, fruitful at once, operative, on the smallest scale, in the young life!

But what shall we say when we pass from matters of conduct into matters of faith? Must there not, here at least, be an offer of helmet and sword which cannot by the nature of the

case have been yet proved by the receiver? Are we to leave the young life to think out or guess out its own religion, and count it to be taking an unfair advantage if we prepossess it in favour of the faith of other people? There are those, in these wonderful days, who thus judge—stranger still, who, at all risks, act upon that judgment. Hence a large multitude of sowers of the wind, reapers of the whirlwind—bewrayed, by the consequences of their action, as having miserably, not to say stupidly, erred somewhere in their reasoning.

Great indeed is the responsibility of arming others, young or old, in our armour. Great the responsibility of offering helmet or coat of mail to those who cannot by the nature of the case have proved them. Well were it if those who have the charge of minds would think more of it. Have they proved their own armour? Can they give a reason, to themselves and to God, for the faith with which they thus preoccupy another?

‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’—always a solemn question—has no graver or more momentous application than to this matter of the transmission of religion. Yet not to transmit it is to be worse than an infidel. For this virtually precludes the faith of them that come after—it hedges up the way of the Christianity of the future. Christianity is not more a faith than

it is a life: and the life has its lifetime—its childhood, its youth, its manhood, its eventide. What right has a Christian (I speak not of any other) to cut off from his son one of these ages? Yet even that is not all. Where is the likelihood of a sudden leap and bound into Christianity at the moment—and what is the moment—of the individual coming of age in the responsibility of religious decision?

There must be an arming of one by another with the Christian panoply if Christianity itself is not to die out of the earth which it has remade. To say otherwise is to have settled the question, and settled it the wrong way, whether the Gospel itself is from heaven or of men. If we believe that Christ took it upon Him to deliver man; if we believe that human life is redeemed by the one 'taking of the manhood into God' which is Incarnation; there is involved in this the responsibility—a responsibility grave to solemnity—of bringing that faith into every corner and crevice of our influence. We must prove, but we must assert when we have proved, the mighty verity, without which good were it not to have been born, that 'God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.'

We pass to a later thought, and one more practical still for us who are here assembled.

The helmet and the sword and the coat of

mail of the Christian faith were first put upon us by others. We thank and we bless God for it. Never could we have forged them, never could we have found them, never could we have put them on, for ourselves. If we had lived to man's estate without them, the force of godless living through the most impressible portion of a lifetime would have been too strong for us: habit would have bound us: vainly should we have struggled to get free. That we were born into a Christendom is the blessing of blessings till one other comes—one which without it scarcely could come.

The armour put on must be proved afterwards. The faith of the childhood must be proved by the man.

O, brethren, risk not the battle of life—risk not the discharge from it—in unproved armour.

‘Prove all things,’ St Paul said. ‘Prove the spirits,’ St John wrote—meaning the professed inspirations of men who came saying, I have a message unto thee, O man, from God. ‘Prove your own selves,’ St Paul said again—always the same word, though with seven various renderings in the English Bible.

Let us listen to the fearless utterances of men who knew that they had God with them and in them, when they challenge us to prove all things, yea, the faith itself.

We would not have you live, and try to die, in unproved, in some one else's armour. 'Prove all things,' we say—that first of all.

You say perhaps, half in a tone of complaint, Faith is an education: I was brought up in it. Or, faith is a tradition, received from the fathers. Or, faith is a prepossession: I was 'prevented' with it: an advantage was taken of my childhood, of my babehood: I was carried to the font—I could not help it: I was sent to school, I was taken to church: why am I a Christian? I was made so.

If you had not been thus treated—even if in some sense it was the unsatisfactory thing of being armed with another's armour—you would have been precluded from an impartial judgment when you grew up. You would have been casehardened in infidelity. You are free to judge now. 'Prove all things.'

How? you say. I am prejudiced now. It would be indecent now to become an infidel. You have me at an advantage. It is disrespectful in England still, not to be nominally a Christian.

Well—you must face that. You will, if you are a man. 'Prove all things.'

If I were on a platform, arguing with atheists, I should adopt *one* course. There I should be speaking to men not yet pledged, or pledged the

other way. And upon them I should urge one argument, not always pressed as it ought to be—All questions must be argued in their appropriate region—‘*in pari materiâ*’ as the saying is. I do not take the telescope to a leaf, nor the microscope to a star: I do not listen to a face, nor look at a voice: I do not taste a colour, nor smell a book. In the same way, if I am asked to believe that Christ died for me, or that God forgives me, or that prayer is heard, or that death is the gate of life, I do not consult Euclid or algebra about it; I know quite well that, true or false, that could not help the decision: no, I remind myself that I am a whole made up of many parts—conscience, feeling, affection, quite as really constituents of my whole being as memory, or intellect, or the critical faculty, cold and bald and naked; and that, if God has spoken, He is sure to have spoken not to one element but to the whole of me; and that therefore I must bring *myself*, the whole of me, to listen whether He has spoken; and if heart and soul find themselves powerfully affected by a professed revelation—if it is seen to exercise an elevating and softening and sweetening influence upon the temper, and the conduct, and the intercourse with others, of those who believe and live it—if, in proportion as a man tries to live the Gospel, the life, the spirit, the man,

is evidently ennobled and beautified—if he really finds the day, the separate day, made this or that, happy and bright and useful, or else heavy and slovenly and miserable, according as it is begun, continued and ended in communion with God through Christ, or the contrary—I see there a proof, real, if not by itself conclusive, that that revelation is from Him who made me; and that, though many questions may remain, as to the authorship of books, or as to the inspiration of a book, or as to the meaning of inspiration itself, and a thousand others, yet these questions lie beside the question of questions, Has God given us eternal life, and has He given it in Jesus Christ?

But now, speaking from a pulpit, and in a congregation of persons worshipping on the faith of Christ, the application of the call to prove all things takes a slightly different form.

It bids us to bring to the proof the armour of Christian profession—which has been put upon us by education or tradition, by common consent or social propriety, or whatever else—by seeing whether it will or will not do for us what we have just now supposed it to do for those whose experience we have spoken of as evidence; whether it can make our lives pure and humble and noble; whether it will bear the strain put

upon it by the particular trials which beset us in the course of daily life ; whether, for example, we can make prayer a comfort and help to ourselves ; whether by really praying to God as our Father we can find ourselves the better for it, the happier, the kinder, the more diligent, the more useful ; whether we can sometimes overcome a temptation to indolence or selfishness or vanity or some more definite sin by calling in the help of the Holy Spirit as promised to those who ask Him—and thus turn profession into practice, and faith into life.

It is here that we fail. If we would know in whom we have believed, it must be by this kind of proof. ‘He that believeth in the Son of God,’ St John says, ‘hath the witness in himself.’ Depend upon it, no other evidence will really keep any man, all through and to the end, a believer. We want something which shall give us a reason for believing like that which assures us of the presence of a dear friend, or of the affection of a person near to us as the life. If we have this, we can feel ourselves safe upon a rock that is higher than we, even though the arguments of the sceptics should succeed sooner or later in making havoc of many of the out-works and many of the circumstantials which were once imagined to be the very citadel of our Gospel.

‘Try the spirits.’ St John gives us a test of them which shows how firm was his own conviction of the truth of truths. He says, ‘Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ as come in the flesh is of God’—and the converse. ‘Hereby know we the spirit of God and the spirit of error.’ You see how wide a margin he left for diverging opinions on minor matters. His question was, Is Jesus Christ safe—the humanity and the deity? Then never mind—all else may be discussed—God Himself may be speaking in unexpected voices, if only the great confession rings out clear and loud.

‘Prove your own selves,’ St Paul says. ‘Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.’ That is more important, that comes nearer to the man within the man, than discussing my credentials, my apostleship, or my consistency. O, if one half of the trouble were taken in proving *ourselves* that is bestowed upon challenging the legality of a dress or a posture, or making some preacher or writer an offender for a word, we should grow apace in that real Christianity which is first humility, and then patience, and then charity.

This which is ever near the heart of a Christian indeed, as he looks out upon the religion of his day and the fortunes of the Gospel, is sometimes brought very near to us by the experiences

of the hour, as they show the steps of the weary traveller nearing the goal of this life, which is the gate of death. Little then will avail the perfectness of the armour, the closeness of its texture, or the exactness of its fitting. Sermons and services and sacraments are then far in the background. Each incident of the life—the earlier, the earliest, not least—starts back into vividness. Sins of the youth, inconsistencies of the manhood, then are a thousand times more to him than any punctualities of attendance or any punctilios of doctrine. The only, only question then is, Has the armour been proved? has it borne the brunt of trial? has it been kept buckled and kept burnished by a living heart-deep communion with the Author and the Finisher, with the Lord and Giver of Life?

‘In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver us.’

TEMPLE CHURCH,
March 17, 1889.

VII.

GAMBLING.

Philippians ii. 30.

(Revised Version.)

Hazarding his life.

THE person spoken of was Epaphroditus—a Philippian who had come to Rome, during St Paul's first imprisonment there, to bring supplies to him from that one church which St Paul allowed to assist him in that way. Epaphroditus had had a dangerous illness in Rome, brought on in some way by his ministry to St Paul. Either anxiety, or over-fatigue, or climate, or infection of some kind arising perhaps from work among the poor Christians in the great city, had ended in an all but fatal sickness, causing great distress both to St Paul himself and to loving hearts at home.

The change of a single letter, only half a diphthong, in the Greek text¹ has given a new and striking significance to the latter clause of the text. 'Not regarding his life,' or, more literally, 'having counselled ill for his life,'

¹ From παραβουλευσάμενος to παραβολευσάμενος.

was the English of the old reading. The trifling alteration just mentioned has made the Apostle's meaning this—'having hazarded his life,' or, in the still more expressive phrase of the original, 'having played the gambler with his life.'

Much attention has been given of late, and not one day too soon, to the prevalence—it is said, the increased and increasing prevalence—amongst us of the ruinous vices of betting and gambling. Convocation has this week been discussing the propriety of issuing a request to the clergy of the province to make these vices the subject of addresses from the pulpit. A caution is to be added that such pulpit notices ought to be judicious. It is felt that rash things might be said, rather injurious than helpful to the cause in hand.

It is indeed a topic demanding careful thought and sober speech. Every one knows the terrific consequences of the habit carried to excess. The frightful havoc made by it of family welfare, the cruel blow struck by it at the heart of parents, the deadly wound inflicted upon consciences, the temptation opened by it to fraud and robbery—these aspects of the vice are patent: they lend themselves to rhetoric, and to something better than rhetoric, in their denunciation. This Temple Church retains the memory of a famous sermon on the subject,

preached in it in the year 1793, almost a hundred years ago—a sermon which passed through several editions, and attracted an amount of public attention never commanded now by any sermon issued from the printing-press. The topic itself is not to be exhausted by a single sermon: it must be (in some sense) ever new, so long as the vice itself retains its hold upon the fallen nature which it stimulates into so malignant and so fatal an activity.

But, though the consequences are admitted on all hands to be terrible, the question has been found quite capable of discussion, whether the thing is wrong in itself, or wrong only in its abuse. Is it wrong to play for insignificant sums? Is it wrong to play for such sums as you and your companion can afford to lose? Is it wrong to play with an old friend or a parent whose evening would lose its accustomed gentle excitement if you refuse to be accessory to it? In short, is there sin in the act itself, or only when it runs riot or at least goes to excess?

The challenge is sometimes given to find a text of Scripture condemning it. The sermon of which I have spoken could find no more apposite text than the perfectly general one, 'The sin which doth so easily beset you.' If you look out in a Concordance the word 'chance,' which is the keynote of the subject,

you will find it absent from the Bible except in a very few places where the context takes out of it all its old significance. Chance was a deity in heathendom: for the Christian it has become providence: and providence excludes chance (strictly so called) from the forces with which humanity has to reckon.

St Paul (in the revised text) seems to commend Epaphroditus for having in some sense played the gambler. But if any one should catch at the phrase as an excuse for gambling, I would bid him to look at the context, and see what the game was, and how Epaphroditus had played it.

Two considerations have occurred to some minds as going far towards the prohibition of the act apart from the consequences.

One of these arises out of the responsibility of having. Money, in the Christian view of it, is the gift of God, and to Him is to be accounted for. Our Lord in the same breath calls it 'the unrighteous mammon' and speaks of being 'faithful' or 'unfaithful' in the use of it. He goes so far as to say that according to the use of it here will be the everlasting state there. 'If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon'—so called, I suppose, because of its manifold temptations and all but universal abuses—'who shall commit to your trust the

true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is so precarious and so fugitive that, even while you have it, it may rather be called another's than your own, who shall give you—shall He, who alone can, give you—that one inalienable possession, that eternal life, which alone deserves to be denominated your own?’

This lifts the question of the right and wrong of risking money upon chances of any kind into a region high above that of the how much and how little. This equalizes, as a matter of principle, the shilling and the farthing, the one pound and the ten thousand. No man is rich enough to be extravagant: and the staking of a shilling upon the chances of a game is the endeavour to withdraw that amount from the sum of the possessions for which you are accountable. It is the same sort of waste as the burning of a bank-note or the flinging of a sovereign into the gutter.

The other consideration requires even closer attention. It makes the real sin of gambling consist in turning into a matter of pecuniary gain or loss that uncertainty of our human condition which God designed for our moral and spiritual discipline. He has hidden from us that which shall be, that we may be led absolutely and confidently to leave it with Him.

Shall we treat that ambiguity of events, which ought to be a solemn and sacred memento of the being and power of God, as a common and profane thing, to be speculated about and trafficked in, amidst light and frivolous talk, or over a table set out for a game?

When we bring the matter into the court of conscience, and weigh it by the shekel of the sanctuary, there is more in it than lies on the surface. Like every question of right and wrong, it waits for Christ to light it up. Some may say, Are there not sins enough without making new ones? Is there not more than work enough for Christian heads and hands without hunting up these trivial, these ambiguous niceties, which, however viewed, cannot touch the spring of Christian living? We feel the force of the appeal, and would be far indeed from branding every game of chance as immoral. Certainly we would not condemn those whom a higher duty or a larger charity has led to take part in these things to the extent already allowed for. But this must not foreclose the enquiry in its wider range and deeper principle.

And in view, if of nothing else, at least of the misery and the demoralization involved in it for thousands of homes and millions of lives, have we not here just one of those evils which

the voluntary combination of Christian people might hope to counteract by the force of influence and example? It lends itself to such treatment far better in my judgment than those leagues against intemperance which have done a good work on the whole, but done it with many violations of the law of good sense and the law of charity. Here is an indulgence which certainly cannot plead either health or necessity in its excuse. Here is a case in which, if in any case, a voluntary vow of abstinence can harm no one in health or wealth. To enter a rigid lifelong vow against the most distant approach to betting or gambling—if not because it is absolutely wrong, at least because it so generally points and leads to wrong—at least because it is the starting-point, to countless thousands, of a career of fraud and ruin—this might be the beginning of a powerful and at last triumphant crusade, far more reasonable, in a Christian judgment, than that *other* rival of the temperance movement, which drags into common mention vices not even to be named, and goes far to despoil one half of the race of that beautiful modesty of which reticence is the condition.

Only let us beware that we import not with this new pledge that worse vice than any that a pledge can combat, the vice of intolerance

and censoriousness towards those who, on principle, or even (if it be so) through human frailty, differ. Temperance in one point has been found too easily associated with intemperance in another—abstinence from one indulgence with an absolute licence in another. True temperance is that Christian self-control which holds the bridle of the tongue as well as of the palate—alas, it has not been so always or in all men. On the topic of this day's discourse let us admit, and speak and think as if admitting, that, though there can be but one opinion on the perilousness of gambling, there may lawfully be two opinions as to the point, or even the fact, of its sinfulness: one man may apply to it one standard of judging, another man another. All can agree thus far: for the rest, let us agree to differ.

But if the spirit of gambling is thus prevalent and thus mischievous in its most obvious domain of the unrighteous mammon, there are at least two other provinces, larger and more vital, to which its presence is no stranger.

St Paul speaks in the text of one who had played the gambler with his life.

We have admitted that he speaks of this gambler not with blame but with praise. 'Hold such,' he says, 'in reputation, because for the work of Christ he put his life in hazard.'

No honest man will misinterpret the saying. No Christian man will deny that life may lawfully (in a certain sense) be staked upon the cast of a die. Epaphroditus went to Rome to carry help from Philippi to St Paul in prison. The climate of Rome is always, or at certain seasons, prejudicial to health. Epaphroditus had no disposition to ask where he could best lodge or when he ought to move. His company was a solace to the holy and now captive Apostle: that was enough. Probably St Paul, who knew (as we learn from his Epistle to them) so many Roman Christians by name, and was no stranger to their various circumstances, employed him in many messages to these of comfort and counsel which he could not carry himself. Whatever the particular cause, Epaphroditus fell ill, and St Paul acknowledged that in his coming and staying he had gambled with his life.

At the present day many must do so, if they would be true either to human or to a higher duty—either to patriotism or to religion. Whole professions exist on an indifference to health. They can only minister to others by neglecting themselves. The physician, the minister, the nurse, can only cease to be gamblers with life (in St Paul's use of those words) when they cease to do the thing they live for. Ministers of

Christ in Africa or in India are all by their very commission gamblers with life. And he would be no Christian, and no man, who could lay this to their charge.

That which all these do with a safe conscience, and ought to be 'held in reputation' for doing, thousands do in that evil spirit of selfishness and self-indulgence which is indeed the very vice of the gambler carried into the region of the life. Yet even here—even apart altogether from Epaphroditus and St Paul—there is a hazarding of life which is manliness, and there is a cherishing of the life which is valetudinarianism or effeminacy. The proverbial bravery of an Englishman is half educated and half created by his early initiation into sports and exercises each one of which may be said to invite accident and even to risk life. But no one would brand this as gambling with life, who valued, as an Englishman ought to value, the result and the product of it.

It is far more of the very opposite life to this that we speak when we rebuke or condemn. Every bad habit, most of all the worst of bad habits, is the real gambling with life. That which is done in defiance of warning from friend and physician—that which is done in the mere speculation of its never being found out or (more hopeless still) of its never finding us

out—that trifling with the character, which will go to the very edge of vice, and even parade its doing so, confident in the self-strength not to pass it, or not to suffer for passing it—this is the manifestation of the speculative tendency which is in all of us: this is, in the worst and vilest of forms, the spirit of gambling carried into the life.

Even than this there is one worse thing—worse, and, alas, commoner.

The very word which St Paul here uses for ‘life’ is the same word which stands in the same Greek language for ‘soul.’

There are some passages of the Gospels in which the two senses of the word are inextricably blended. As where our Lord says, if we take the one rendering, ‘He that loveth his soul shall lose it, and he that hateth his soul in this world shall keep it unto life eternal:’ or, if we take the other rendering, ‘He that loveth his life,’ and, ‘he that hateth his life:’ and it needs a scribe well instructed to disentangle the sense from the parabolical imagery which veils it.

To play the gambler with the life is serious—to play the gambler with the soul is graver still, and, we are obliged to add, still commoner.

Is not this the occupation of half the world? Not the having decided that this life is the whole of being, and as a natural inference the saying, ‘Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we

die.' Not even the deliberate conviction, and the conduct corresponding to it, that on the whole the uncertainties of a future life are too great to make it worth while to take it practically into account ; so that it is wiser and better to make the very most of this world and leave out of sight and out of reckoning the other. Not this. On the contrary—to accept what books say, and sermons, and Scripture texts ; to hold as a doctrine, to hold as an opinion, that there is a world to come, and that there is a day of judgment, and that Christ is the Saviour of the world, and that we ought to believe in Him and to keep His commandments : and yet, though conscious that He has no place in our life and less than none in our heart, to cherish or at least to suffer the vague peradventure that, after all, the tale may have little meaning though the words are strong ; that, after all, there may be indulgence, there may be a mercy uncovenanted yet not the less effectual, so that we may chance it still, live while we live and die when we must, take the last leap into darkness and be in company with the large majority of those we know, and not suffer so very much, or at all events (do not many divines say so ?) not for ever.

These men play the gambler with the soul, if not with the life. Men who would call themselves fools and madmen if they thought, or

acted as if they thought, that a mortal disease might be left to heal itself, or that the utter neglect of their worldly affairs might not quite lead to ruin, yet carry into their spiritual concerns a recklessness quite as presumptuous; chance eternity as they would chance no day and no hour of time and no most trivial item of business; and write their own epitaphs against an evening which has no to-morrow—‘This man played the gambler with his soul—and he lost the game.’

Brethren, while there is time, let us look into these things. To chance the life to come is to carry speculation into a region where it becomes at once the crime which Scripture denominates tempting God. As well might you throw yourself from the pinnacle of the temple trusting that angels would guard you against the consequences of your presumption. From this last recklessness of the gambler may the Divine Spirit save us all—writing deeply upon our hearts that most opposite lesson of St Peter, ‘Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’

TEMPLE CHURCH,

July 7, 1889.

VIII.

STRONG LANGUAGE.

Matthew v. 37.

*But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay :
for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

THE words close a paragraph of the great Sermon.

Our Lord is illustrating His office of the Interpreter. He is not come to destroy, but to fulfil. He takes the Law of Sinai as His text-book, and comments upon its clauses. 'It was said to them of old time...but I say unto you.' The tone is that of authority: but it is not the authority to annul any previous word of God, but only to analyze it—to dive deep into its principle, and to reproduce the letter in its spirit.

Every one of the ten commandments is thus dealt with in the course of His ministry. Several of them are thus dealt with in this one Sermon. The paragraph before us might be

regarded as a commentary on the 3rd commandment, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain'—or on the 9th, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' But it may be rather the interpretation of a verse in the 19th chapter of Leviticus, 'Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God.'

In any case it gives us the Christian view of a wide subject—that of appeals to God in the form of oath or vow; traces the thing to its source, reduces it to a principle, and lays down upon it the comprehensive rule which has been just read as the text.

Oaths and vows may seem to have little in common; but they both use the name of God (or some name which involves it), and they both use that name in confirmation of some statement or some promise which would otherwise have to rest solely upon the Yea or Nay of the man.

This is what all oaths and all vows have in common. Both imply that the simple affirmation is not enough to guarantee truth or to secure performance, to gain assent or to warrant confidence (as the case may be)—it must be supported, it must be strengthened, by calling God in. A man will be afraid to do that lightly: if he is willing to do that, he gives all

he can in proof of his veracity in the one case, of his fidelity in the other.

In the childhood of the race such appeals were permitted, were in certain cases commanded, in divine legislation. The reality of God was the first thing to be taught; and such appeals recognized, and even helped to realize, that. Just as a visible sanctuary aided the consciousness of God's presence, so the use of His name in human transactions not only expressed but conveyed the conviction of His being and of His truth.

It was enough in those early days to impress the duty of seriousness and of reverence in the use of His name. The 3rd commandment, and the 9th commandment, and several scattered precepts of the Law and the Prophets, were satisfied with this. Let the man who vows something to God take care to pay it. Let the man who swears by God take care that he does so truthfully. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour' was the elementary morality of the Decalogue. 'Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay,' was caution enough for those times—and a caution never superfluous.

That there has been progression in the divine teaching, even as regards morals, can be doubted by no student of the Sermon on the

Mount. 'It was said to (not by) them of old time—but *I* say unto *you*' (both pronouns being emphasized in the original), is sufficient warrant for it. The same Lord taught in both dispensations. It was not, 'Moses said thus, but I say otherwise.' This would have been just that destroying of the Law and the Prophets which the Lord of the Gospel emphatically disclaimed. The stress lies not so much on the speaker as on the spoken to. To them of old time God by Moses spoke thus: now to you of the Gospel age, the fulness of the time being come for it, God by His Son speaks thus—speaks to interpret and to fulfil.

And He begins by sweeping away all those glosses and subterfuges with which teachers and people alike had overlaid the simplicity of the letter. Scribes and Pharisees had said, To swear by the temple is nothing—to swear by the gold of the temple is the only oath binding. To swear by the altar is nothing—to swear by the gift upon the altar is a solemn and serious thing. And timid consciences had taken refuge in appeals evading the name of God—mentioning heaven or earth, naming the holy city or naming their own head, and counting themselves secured against profanity by doing so. Upon each and all of these He throws the searching light of reason and conscience, by saying,

Whither wilt thou go from God's presence? where wilt thou discover the thing which is nothing to God? What is heaven? it is God's throne: what is earth? it is God's footstool: what is Jerusalem, but the city of the great King? Nay, thine own frame, or any part of it, so fearfully and wonderfully made, is it, thus appealed to, aught else but God's handywork? The hairs of thy head are all numbered by Him—thou canst not make one of them white or black.

It being thus impossible to evade God in such 'oaths for confirmation,' what is the moral? Shall it be simply not to forswear thyself? whether heaven or earth, whether Jerusalem or thine own head, be the thing appealed to, to take heed that thou speak truly or that thou speak faithfully, remembering that God is in each of them, named or unnamed? 'I say unto you, Swear not at all: let your communication be Yea, yea, Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'

The prohibition is large and general. Swear not at all. Yes and No, simple affirmation, simple denial, let these suffice you. Anything beyond these, any expletive by which you would strengthen your evidence or give emphasis to your promise, cometh of evil, or (as it might be rendered) is of the wicked one. What

shall we say? Is the officer of the court speaking against Christ when he administers the oath to a witness? Is the subject offending against the great King when he takes the oath of allegiance to the sovereign? Are the man and the woman standing before the holy table guilty of forgetting Christ when they make their vow of mutual faithfulness 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost?' Was St Paul guilty when he wrote the words, 'Behold, before God, I lie not?' Or was the One greater than St Paul contradicting His own principle when He suffered the High Priest to adjure Him by the living God, accepted the appeal and answered the question?

These reflexions will check a hasty interpretation even of the divine Interpreter before us. That such caution is necessary, not in this instance only, is evident when we reach the precept 'not to resist evil'—smitten on the one cheek, to turn the other—compelled to go a mile, to go twain—to give to every man that asks of us, and of him that takes away our goods not to ask them back. We are not to create a new 'letter' out of the new 'spirit'—principle rather than rule is the thing always to be looked for.

And surely without fanaticism and without folly we can read the principle here.

Swear not at all. Let your language be Yes and No. The Christian man's word should be as good as, and (if so) is better than, his oath. As good, because an oath can add nothing to it—better, because every attempt to add to it implies a lower level of morals.

Therefore, in the first place, a Christian legislature ought to be on the watch to abolish oaths in every quarter and on every subject ripe for it. In every distinctively Christian society, the abolition ought to be total. To be asked to swear should be an insult. In mixed societies, like this motley Christendom, where the bad come and go with the good, where the discovery of crime is so large a part of the work of government, and where even for purposes of common justice between man and man wrong may be done, cruel and irreparable, by supposing a state of enlightenment which is not yet, and lifting into an unreal elevation institutions which to be of any use must deal with the thing that is—it may be necessary, if only because of the hardness of hearts, to leave some provinces under the operation of the Law rather than of the Gospel. But even here let it be the aim of a Christian legislature to raise the tone and to lift the level up to the standard, in all things, of the divine Master. And that standard is, in this department, Swear not at all.

But there is a province in which the precept needs no modifying and no temporizing. It is the province of everyday intercourse and of common speech.

We have all, certainly the older of us, witnessed a great improvement in this respect in decent society. The profane use of the very name of God was common, both in the form of blessing and cursing, even on the lips of women, in the table-talk of two generations ago. The most awful and horrible imprecations occurred in every other sentence of some men's conversation, and they were not scouted or avoided in consequence. All this is gone. But its departure has not left in universal possession the Yea and the Nay, the simple assertion and the plain denial, which our Lord declares to be the only innocent form of speech. New expletives are invented, adopted, popularized, at last vulgarized, one by one, each of which, if tried by our Lord's test, would be found to have in it some element of connexion with things sacred or awful—at all events cannot be kept out of His domain, in some one of its provinces, of whom it is written, 'If I climb up to heaven, Thou art there: if I go down to hell, Thou art there also.'

Our subject last Sunday carried us into a debatable ground between absolute and relative evil, and suggested the thought of a possible

combination among thoughtful people to put it down, in mercy to the multitudes who are its desperate victims. Today we deal with a matter which has to do more entirely (yet not absolutely so) with the individual man. Would it be amiss for each one of us to examine the favourite expletive—almost every one has one—with which we garnish or season or seek to strengthen our language, by the standard here applied by Jesus our Lord to the expressions in use in His day for the same purpose. Temple and altar, heaven and earth, Jerusalem and the man's own head, seem to have been common phrases of this kind then; and our Lord sees in each of them, even in the last, a divine reference because a divine connexion. How would it be if He were to sit in judgment on some of our commonest expletives? With the exception perhaps of a few too utterly silly and meaningless to deserve to be dealt with otherwise than as so many insults to the understanding by which God has differenced us from the beasts that perish—and therefore, even these, not quite without their connexion with more serious considerations—which of them would not be brought within the scope of that divine expostulation, Heaven is God's throne, earth is God's footstool—your very head is not yours, you cannot make one hair white or black?

The attempt to strengthen speech by appeals, more or less serious, to something supposed to be external to us or superior, is a disparagement of that speech which we seek to strengthen. Our Lord bids us to resent this. Your communication (your 'word,' the Greek says) needs, or should need, and, if unhappily it does need, can get, no confirmation. Say or deny—let that suffice you. Christ pleads for our 'word.' He stands up for the truthfulness of each one of us. To try to add to the word is to misgive it. He would have the standard of a man's veracity so high that it cannot be lifted higher.

It has been said—and there is great force in it—that society itself exists on the supposition that it is more likely than not that men will speak truth. A society in which the balance of probability was the other way would be either a society not yet civilized, or else a society demoralized into worthlessness. An oath, or that which affects the same character, a strengthening expletive, insults the society in which you live with this alternative of reproach.

But let us who hear the Word of God in Jesus Christ and would do it think rather of the honour to which He here lifts us, when He says, Let your communication be Yea, yea, Nay, nay: it is enough—your word is enough—and whatsoever goes beyond the mere word cometh of

evil. He would have us to assert for ourselves that honour which He does us, as utterers (of course) of truth and truth only. His direct warning may be against attempts to confirm the word by appeals (in any form) to one greater. But the indirect warning is against suffering our word to need such confirmation. His real reproof is turned against those exaggerations of speech, in things human or in things divine, which shake men's confidence in the thing spoken, and tempt the man who would be believed to call witnesses (so to say)—supernatural it may be, external to himself at all events—to the truth of his own word.

Exaggerations of speech are many, and they infest all sorts and conditions of utterance. In their lowest forms, they are the nursing-mothers of gossip and scandal: tattlers and busybodies, newsmongers and society papers, could not live without them. Great reproach is in the thought—for who is altogether capable of an atmosphere absolutely truthful?

Alas for the saying—there are exaggerations of speech even among historians, even concerning the dead. Where is the writer who can afford to be scrupulously true—foreseeing as he must do the reproach of dulness if he cannot tinge and colour, if he cannot, by detraction or by its opposite, surprise and startle, if he cannot

even in the region of fact—nothing is easier to the unscrupulous—in some way seem to originate?

But the infection spreads further, and into a province where 'word' ought to be *the* word. What sect, what heresy—nay, but what party, what 'school of thought,' in the church—does not deal in, almost live upon, exaggeration? To isolate is to exaggerate, where the topic is revelation. One text of Scripture, stripped bare of connexion and context, divorced from other texts which correct and balance it, may support, may even seem to prove, the inference of doctrine drawn from it, and yet the use to which it is turned may be fatal to the harmony, to the consistency, to the good sense, to the morality, of God's truth as a whole. This is exaggeration in divine things—and nowhere are its evils more conspicuous. To such abuses of doctrine, whether in the sacramental direction, or in that of conversion, justification, assurance, or the eternal state, we may well apply the warning before us as to the incomparable sanctity of truth, alike in the scrupulosity (for its own sake) of its utterances, and in the responsibility involved in them towards the consciences of its hearers.

Other and tenderer attractions draw us to the Person and Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If ever for a moment we seem to divert your thoughts from these, God forgive us—we mean not so. It is in the cross itself that the life of God centres for each of us; and no word of exhortation can have much force, it scarcely ought to have, save for those who have first seen the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and have therein washed and been made clean every whit.

Yet it is not in the perpetual repetition of a single formula—if it be even the formula which is the Gospel, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’—that the whole ministry is contained. The Bible, the Gospel itself, is much larger and more varied than this in its topics of teaching. And sometimes the selection of one characteristic of the mind that was in Christ Jesus may not be without its value in drawing towards and at last to the Saviour some hungering and thirsting soul not yet won to its own peace.

There is something, to my mind, at once striking and touching in the thought of Him presented this morning, as the soul of truth and honour—the divine Man who is so jealous for the word, the human word (so to say), of His creatures, that He will not have it propped or buttressed by oath or vow or other appeal to a greater than itself, but will have it go forth pure

and simple from the mouth of the man into the ear of his fellow, assuming assent because conscious of rectitude.

Yes, the honour, the spotless honour, of the divine Teacher breathes here in the teaching. To be on the side of Jesus Christ is to be on the side of all that is honourable, all that is noble, all that is true, as well as of all that is pure and virtuous, men themselves being the judges.

And if He who thinks thus highly of us as God made and as He has redeemed us—He who bids us just to speak the truth and expect to be believed without further insistence or higher appeal—has also felt for us in our fall from this high ideal; not lifting us up rudely or violently, but gradually and thoughtfully educating us back to it—Himself (in order to do this) dying as well as living for us; shall we not feel the double compulsion of a love thus respectful as well as thus devoted—and when He says to us once again, as He says today, Come to me that ye may have life, answer with one voice, and mean it—

Lo, glad I come, and Thou, blest Lamb,
Shalt take me to Thee as I am—
Nothing but sin I Thee can give,
Nothing but love shall I receive.

TEMPLE CHURCH,
July 14, 1889.

IX¹.

A PLEA FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB.

Isaiah 1. 4.

*The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned,
that I should know how to speak a word in season to
him that is weary : He wakeneth morning by morn-
ing, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.*

Psalm xxviii. 1.

(Revised Version.)

*Be not Thou deaf unto me ; lest, if Thou be silent unto
me, I become like them that go down into the pit.*

SPEECH and hearing are combined in both the texts. The tongue and the ear in the first, deafness and dumbness in the second.

The subject of this day's almsgiving is fertile in suggestion. I would turn it to account. It is also fertile in Scripture allusions. I have read you two texts : I would fain have added two others to them. One from the Old Testament. 'Who hath made man's mouth ? or who maketh a man dumb or deaf ? is it not I, the Lord ?'

¹ Preached in aid of the Llandaff School for the Deaf and Dumb.

And one from the New Testament. 'He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.'

But the two texts have this peculiarity, that they lift the whole subject into a higher region than that of any bodily exercise of speech and hearing, giving us a splendid glimpse of the great analogy which runs through God's whole dealing, in nature, in providence, and in grace. 'All things are double, one against another; and He hath made nothing imperfect'—nothing isolated and solitary. 'One thing establisheth the good of another; and who shall be filled with beholding His glory'—His self-manifestation in all departments of operation?

The text from Isaiah describes the inward ear as wakened morning by morning to the voice of God Himself, and the tongue as taught of God Himself to speak a word in season to weary and comfortless souls. The text from the Psalter, with a boldness characteristic of the Bible, ascribes to God Himself both ear and tongue, prays Him not to be deaf, prays Him not to be dumb, to the cry and quest of His creature, and declaring that to find God deaf or dumb is the very death and burial of the human being. 'Be not deaf, be not silent, lest I become like them that go down into the pit.'

Our first duty this afternoon is to set fully before ourselves the case and condition to which we are asked to minister. What is this School for the Deaf and Dumb? Why is it wanted? What makes it one of the many claimants of Christian bounty? Are there any considerations which ought to give it a prominent place among the charities of Christian England?

Some, perhaps, have imagined the calamity itself to be a rare and exceptional one. It is not so. A computation was made about half a century ago—and probably the facts are not greatly altered now—by which it appeared that the number of the deaf and dumb in the several countries of Europe (England included) gave an average of about one in every fifteen hundred persons. At that time there were from twelve to fourteen hundred deaf mutes in our own country. About one in every fifteen or sixteen hundred of our own fellow-countrymen is destitute of the two powers of speech and hearing. Instances are given of particular families, in one of which no less than seven out of ten children, and in another no less than seven out of eight children were deaf and dumb.

Deaf—and dumb. Have we ever thought what this means? Have we realized the solitude, the silence, the void and the blank, the monotony and the dreariness, of such an exist-

ence? To be debarred from all the instruction, all the kindness, all the sympathy, which enters by the ear; to be debarred from so much as asking a question, making a request, expressing a feeling, uttering a want, telling a sorrow, breathing an affection—have we tried to fancy what this would be, what it would be for one day or one hour, even were the next hour or day to give the gifts back to us in full tale?

Solitary confinement indeed.

Some may say that perhaps the want is less felt where there has been no experience of its supply. But there is such a thing as a deafness and dumbness not congenital, not dating from the birth, but caused by some sudden shock, caused by fever or accident, and leaving therefore a melancholy memory both of speech and hearing. And where this is not so, still the want is. If there is no conscious intelligent missing, no definite craving for powers never possessed, still there is the same actual poverty of the life, the same destitution of all its zest and all its joy.

We could almost wish, if we stopped here, that the old idea were the true one, that these defective frames held no human intelligence and no human affection, no yearning for intercourse and no capacity of knowledge. It is not so. Within that profound silence, unbroken (save

in some faintest vibration) by pealing organ, sounding trumpet, or crashing thunderstorm, there dwells a soul not inaccessible to pain and pleasure, not incapable of purpose or feeling, not absolutely destitute of ideas and sentiments, not wholly passive or inanimate even as to the alternatives of vice and virtue. Inferior, it must be confessed—inferior, not by constitution, but by circumstance—to surrounding souls which have all the faculties at command for the reception and communication of influence; inferior to these, actually and in the present, morally perhaps, intellectually perforce; there is yet between those and these not only a resemblance but an identity of nature, which makes both alike human, and leaves no doubt, as to the one any more than as to the other, in what category of animals to place them. We picture to ourselves in these silent ones, solitary among a multitude, a condition, to begin with, of double childishness, of double credulity, of double irritability and passionateness. We picture to ourselves a dulled but not deadened capacity alike of grief and joy, alike of attachment and gratitude, alike of interest and of emulation—day succeeding day without uttering to it speech, night following night without showing it knowledge. In all this what room is there for acquiescence, as though the condition itself were one negative

only, making no demand either upon the tear of compassion or upon the hand of help?

This was the old world's estimate, where it did not form a harsher. Heathen philosophers, nay, even Christian fathers, declared the deaf incapable of knowledge. Popular opinion viewed the deaf mute as under a curse, a reproach to the mother that bare him, a useless burden upon the supplies of earth, sentenced by the laws of political economy to an excusable and justifiable putting to death. Pitiable state! Who can even read of it, or think of its hecatombs of victims through all those ages, unmoved? Had the Gospel of a divine Christmas no balm in its Gilead for these?

Yet for long centuries the Gospel, as it interpreted itself on a corrupt earth to selfish men, was itself deaf, was itself dumb, to these mute unconscious suppliants—scarcely so much as looked upon them, as it passed them by on the other side. God has secluded them, it said, by His ban or at least His fiat, from human access: only by the ear can knowledge be made available; only by the tongue can the evangelist himself convey wisdom. Not till the fifteenth century (they say) was the possibility of instructing the deaf mute so much as hinted in any work that has come down to us. Then first was the thought—revelation we might almost

call it—placed on record, ‘Written characters, and ideas, may be connected together without the intervention of sounds.’ Not till far on in the sixteenth century do we hear of any public practitioner of the art of teaching the deaf and dumb, and he—let us record it to the credit of a country not always found in the van of civilization—he was a Spaniard. Perhaps in many lands and in many forms was the discovery simultaneously made, and in the words of one of these pioneers we read, it may be, the convictions and the experiences of many—‘Thus a soul which has slumbered awakes—a mind which has been in darkness opens to the light—a savage, strange to our customs, is initiated into our ideas, our knowledge, our speech.’

Interesting histories tell of the adventures of one of these philanthropists in France during the reign of terror in the great Revolution—how he, a priest, and therefore a ‘suspect,’ was arrested, imprisoned, and awaiting execution, when he was saved for the moment by a petition of his own pupils—once themselves deaf and dumb—read, amidst the plaudits of the audience, at the bar of the Assembly; how he was at a later time saved from the uplifted sword of the executioner by a devoted workman who threw himself between, and said, ‘You shall run through my body to get at his;’ how

one of the caprices of that fickle people raised then a sudden enthusiasm in his favour—the intending murderers embraced him, and he was escorted home in triumph. It was this man's famous pupil, himself rescued by his skill from the mental prison-house of the deaf mute, who gave birth to some of the most striking intellectual utterances of the metaphysician. 'What is gratitude? The memory of the heart.' 'What is a sense? An idea-carrier.' 'What is ambition? The hovering of a soul round a coveted object.' 'What is eternity? A day without a yesterday or a tomorrow.'

The education of the deaf and dumb won its way, we have seen, by slow steps and stages, into a place among the possibilities of Christian philanthropy. But of late years it has done more. It has become a devout study, a defined science, a fruitful art. Institutions for its effective practice have been at work in England for at least half a century. A former Vicar of Doncaster cannot be out of place in pleading for the deaf mute in his new home at Llandaff. The Llandaff School for the Deaf and Dumb is itself (through its excellent master) the child of the Yorkshire Institution at Doncaster. It is thus that a succession of runners hands on the torch of life—life from the dead for two worlds—the world of activity and of enjoyment here, the

world of wider activities and of higher joys hereafter.

It is not the first time that the cause of the deaf and dumb has been pleaded in this Cathedral. The then Archdeacon of Llandaff, afterwards Dean, preached for it on Christmas Day, 1875. The worshippers in the Cathedral, unknown to themselves, are contributors (through the Chapter) of a small annual donation to this School for the Deaf and Dumb from the Offertory Fund. From this day forward let it hold a more prominent place, beloved brethren, among the objects of your interest, your sympathy, and your liberality.

But it would be the waste, in large part, of what I feel to be an opportunity, if I failed to draw from the subject a concluding word or two of application.

(1) 'Wonderfully made' a Psalmist calls us, and he makes it a motive for thankfulness. 'I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am wonderfully made.' In no respect more wonderfully than in the two, the twin gifts—the gift of hearing and the gift of speech. The very attempt, futile as it is, to imagine ourselves possessed of neither or deprived of both is salutary in directing the attention at least to a wonderful blessing too often treated by us as a thing of course. If any one has ever suffered, for a few

weeks, from the loss of hearing but in one ear, he has been made conscious, by that temporary and partial deprivation, of the value of the gift of hearing to the comfort and efficiency of the life. But O, to have lost altogether, for ever, the sense of hearing—never again to be allowed to hear the conversation that is liveliest, the melody that is sweetest, the voice that is dearest! Yet even this is better than one other thing—never to have had it—never to have known what conversation is, what music is, what (dearest of all) the human voice is. When we give God thanks for ‘all the blessings of this life,’ let us sometimes expressly mention this.

And the sister gift, of speech. We have mentioned the speech of others, let us mention our own. When we are in sickness, not to be able to express a want—when we would convey to a friend some thought which God has put into us—when we would breathe into some loving ear the loving emotion of the heart, not to be able—how sad! what a privation! If we have ever, in the most modified and mitigated sense, for a few days or weeks, lost our voice, what a helplessness overpowers us! Almost a feeling of shame, as though we were deprived of that which differentiates man from beast—of that which the Psalmist calls our ‘glory.’ To have lost the ‘glory’ for ever—but O, never to

have possessed it—never to have spoken one word by which any one can remember us—one word which shall have distinguished us from the lump of matter in which we are embedded—would not this have been worse? ‘I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am wonderfully made.’

(2) A second thought follows—‘fearfully made.’ And even for this the Psalmist gives thanks. This second thought is the responsibility of the two gifts—hearing and speech. For every sound to which the ear listens—for listening is (by definition) voluntary hearing—we are responsible. We can stop the ear. It is in our power to stop the ear against evil: alas, it is in our own power to stop the ear against good. For both we are responsible. The deaf mute is free. He is not ‘fearfully made,’ if by ‘fearfully’ we mean, with serious consequences if the sense be not rightly used in admitting and refusing. The ear is not the gate—it is the porter. It has to discriminate between right and wrong applicants for admission. Alas, how often does the smart, showy, meretricious applicant pass the wicket, and the grave, serious, religious applicant find itself shut out!

I press the responsibility of the ear because it is the less obvious. Upon the responsibility of the tongue no moralist, no Book of Scripture, is silent. Alas, if the ear slays its thousands,

the tongue slays its ten thousands. Whose tongue will bear the test? whose tongue is ready for the 'opening of the books?'

And yet gratitude is not inconsistent with this responsibility. If for nothing else, we can thank God for the self-criterion with which He has supplied us in the ear and in the tongue. Yes, the deaf mute lacks two of the surest instruments of that most painful but most necessary wisdom—the knowledge of himself. What sounds does the ear love to drink in? What sounds does the tongue love to pour out? Sounds, the ear, of beauty and grace and love? sounds of God speaking, God 'wakening' it (as the text says) 'morning by morning?' Sounds, the tongue, all of kindness, all of purity, all of benefiting—that 'speaking as it were God's oracles' to which St Peter invites us? Or the very opposite of all these—sounds of folly, sounds of discord, sounds corrupt and corrupting? Give thanks for this test of your state—your state before God—your state for eternity. 'By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.'

(3) A third thought is pressed upon us by the subject, and it is that of the fertility, the inventiveness, the victoriousness, of Christian love.

Could any case be imagined more depressing, more discouraging, more dismaying, to Christian

effort, than that of the deaf mute? Who might not be excused for saying, as men said for ages and generations, It is the hand of God—before it I bow and worship, against it I cannot struggle—‘woe to him that striveth with his Maker?’

By what channel can I make knowledge, divine or human, enter this inaccessible fortress, the mind, the conscience, the soul, of this framework of flesh and blood from which the power of hearing has been, accidentally or of purpose, omitted? As well might I construct a ladder the top of which might reach Uranus or Neptune, as attempt an entrance, by voice or hand, into this castle which has moat and has no bridge. You have heard how the inaccessibility pressed alike upon philosophers of heathendom and fathers of Christendom. Can you wonder? To this moment probably most of us have no conception how it could be done—how that union between letters and ideas, without help of sounds, was ever or is now daily effected. Which of us, average men, passable Christians, would not have raised the siege of that fort, despairing of our men and guns for its capture?

So did not the Christian heroes of Spain, France, and Holland—so do not the Christian heroes of Doncaster and Llandaff—and according to their faith it is, and it has been, done to them.

To despair of nothing is Christian faith: to despair of no man is Christian charity.

(4) Yet another word comes to me. It has to do with the sign and token given us, in this deplorable yet not hopeless condition of the deaf mute, of the independence of the personal being of any one or any number of his present conditions of life.

Here is a human body, and here is a human mind, heart, and soul in it. This particular body is made without two of its proper senses. The ear is deaf to sounds: the tongue is dumb as to articulate speech. Thus it has (so to say) no ingress and no egress of knowledge; no communication with beings around it; no power of being influenced and of influencing by the ordinary means of intercourse; only by enormous and quite modern effort susceptible of so much as the most elementary information as to the being of God, as to the history, duty, or destiny of man. Yet in two ways we find this deprivation less than fatal. To a certain extent it can be remedied. Much can be done to inform, much to discipline, much to educate. That is something. That is a witness to the compensating grace by which disadvantage may be struggled with, supplemented, fertilized. But it is more to my present purpose to call attention to the humanity *nevertheless*—the mind, heart,

and soul *nevertheless*—of this imperfectly constituted being. This deaf mute is a man for all that. God can communicate with him, and he can communicate with God, on an equal footing of creation, redemption, and immortality with that of the most privileged of the race.

Does it not seem to say to us, You may lose, you might have been born without, almost any particular portions whatsoever of this which is the ordinary framework of the human life. Sight and hearing, touch and speech, are so many connecting links with a world of matter. They are conveniences, they are facilities, they are ornaments, they are not necessities, even of the life lived in the flesh. You might lose, you might never have had, any or all of them, and yet you might have been a man—intelligent, religious, immortal—only waiting for your development a little longer than others. Consequently, this body may in due time drop off from all of us—sight, hearing, touch, taste, the organs of each, laid in the grave to see corruption—and we still be. Nay, if we rightly read certain words of Scripture—written, first of all, of the Lord Himself—the very dying in flesh may itself be the quickening in spirit, not only contemporaneous with but even conducive to it. ‘Put to death in flesh’—at the same moment, by the same act, ‘quickened in spirit.’

This body is a help, but it is a hindrance. It helps the life of time: it clogs the life of eternity. Do not think or talk as though this particular organism were the only possible one for an intelligent, reflective, spiritual being. Do not accept the argument for one moment, that, because these particular organizations would be unsuitable to the climate or atmosphere of Saturn or Jupiter, therefore those planets are empty—have been, are, and must be. Be well assured that for such as shall be ‘counted worthy to attain that world’ there shall be a life different in every respect from the life that is here—communication not by ear or tongue: all of us—taking the words on the footing of the letter—all of us will be deaf mutes in heaven. There shall be a more than sensible, more than mesmeric, more than electric intercourse there between soul and soul. Thoughts shall there not be talked, they shall be thought, into ears which are minds there. ‘God is spirit’ already, ‘and they that would worship Him must’ even here ‘worship in spirit.’ But there, in that world beyond death, not worship only, not prayer or praise, but communications of all kinds, with God, or with angels, or with men, will all be ‘in spirit’—in spirit, and therefore ‘in truth’—that kind of truth which knows no integuments and no disguises of sense, like the city itself

which ‘had no need of the sun nor of the moon to shine in it, because the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.’

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,
January 10, 1886.

X¹.

THE POSTAL SYSTEM IN ITS BENEFICENT AND RELIGIOUS ASPECT.

2 Corinthians iii. 3.

An epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

AN 'epistle' is a letter. 'Epistle' is a word formed from the Greek—'letter' from the Latin. 'Epistle' does not occur in the English Old Testament: there it is always 'letter,' or (quite as often and quite as correctly) in the plural form, 'letters.' To our ear 'letter' sounds simpler and less formal than 'epistle': one sometimes wishes that it had been used in the English Bible even for the Apostles' writings—St Paul's letter to the Romans or the Galatians, St Paul's first or second letter to the Thessalonians, or (as here) to the Corinthians. It would have made them perhaps more real to us as what they were

¹ Preached at a gathering of officers of the Cardiff Post Office in Llandaff Cathedral.

and what they are—letters, from a real man to real places and people, sent by him, and reaching them, just as letters between friends, quite natural, quite on subjects of living life, matters intensely interesting alike to the writer and to the readers.

An epistle is a letter. ‘An epistle of Christ,’ then, is ‘a letter of (from) Christ.’

We do not possess any letter of Jesus Christ’s. There was a spurious correspondence, known to the early Church, between Christ and a prince of Mesopotamia, who applied to Him for help in sickness—but it was a forgery. Indeed, by the nature of the case it must have been so, for there were no Christians in Mesopotamia till Christ Himself was gone back to heaven.

The nearest approach to an actual epistle of Christ is found in the addresses to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. They are composed in His name, and the order for that composition is given in the word ‘Write.’ Each one of them might be described as ‘an epistle of Christ, ministered by His servant John.’

When St Paul speaks here of ‘an epistle of Christ,’ he does so in figure. We might say (in modern phrase) he is drawing an illustration from the Post Office.

Look for a moment at the text itself.

St Paul is speaking of what we call letters of

introduction, or letters testimonial. He asks, Are such letters needed between me and you? Apollos had such (we read in the 18th chapter of the Acts) when he first passed from Ephesus to Corinth: the disciples in the one place wrote to the disciples in the other place to receive him. But St Paul, after his long ministry at Corinth, needed no such recommendation. And he turns the idea very beautifully. Ye yourselves, he says, are my testimonial, my letter of introduction. That letter is written on my heart—it is, in other words, my deep love for you—all men, wherever I go, can read it: the report of our mutual affection, and of the ground of it in the faith of Christ, forms my credentials everywhere in new places. You will find an exact parallel to this in the first chapter of his first Epistle to the Thessalonians.

And then he enlarges a little upon it in the verse read as the text.

This known love between you and me is my letter of introduction elsewhere. Christ wrote it—I carry it. It is Christ's letter, 'ministered by me'—either as its amanuensis or as its carrier. But Christ wrote it—not with ink, and not on material tablets—but by the Spirit of the living God, and on hearts of flesh, mine and yours, as its tablets.

The text was suggested to me by the occa-

sion. We are welcoming this afternoon to the mother church of the diocese a large company of men whose every-day life connects them with the postal service of the country.

It seems natural to enquire whether there is anything about your work in the Bible. There is more about it there than you might suppose. A Concordance will present a somewhat full record under the heads of Epistle, Letter, and Letters. Many of the entries are sad and sorrowful ones. The first (I think) of all, is that fatal letter of King David to his unworthy confidant Joab about Uriah. See there what a letter may have in it—a cruel and treacherous edict of murder. And that, for the sake of another crime. Alas for poor fallen human nature! And the next in order is like it. It is the letter of the wicked queen Jezebel to the elders of Jezreel about Naboth. Again an edict of murder. Only, this time, not from one to whose whole life it is a contradiction. Jezebel was not even in name a worshipper, much less a servant, of God. But let it just show us what you may be stamping, what you may be carrying, in that unopened, that privileged, that sacred budget of the daily letters. Let it give an element of awe, of solemnity, to the daily ministration. There may be corruption in that bundle, and you may be innocent of it.

Soon after, we come to the threatening letter of Sennacherib to the good king Hezekiah. So early are we warned that there are letters breathing terror to hearts guilty or innocent; that the post is a ministry of sorrow as well as of joy: there are those whom your daily work, with no fault of yours, will agitate, will distress, will torture. Happy then that the same holy record of the Bible leaves not the bane without its antidote. When king Hezekiah received that Assyrian missive at the hand of the messengers, and read it, he went up straight-way into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. There he found comfort: thence he received an answer of peace. So let us deal with our letters of distress or difficulty—let us spread them before the Lord.

Nor are we left without a counter-example, in the records of the same reign, of what letters may be in the service of good. ‘The posts went with letters from the king throughout all Israel and Judah, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God—be not stiffnecked, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and serve Him. The posts passed from city to city through the country;’ and though many ‘laughed to scorn (as they would now) and mocked them,’ yet, it is added, ‘divers humbled themselves:’ nay, in Judah at least, ‘the hand of God was at

work to give them one heart to do the commandment.' So it is still. Momentous issues hang upon that daily stamping, sorting, delivering. Issues, not all of evil—some of eternal good, to give an expected, a blessed end.

We cannot open these temple-doors to you today without full hearts. We owe you so much—so very much—every one of us. What is a day worth, when its post fails? What is the coming down in the morning, what is the breakfast-table, what is the business of the day, and what are its pleasures, if there has not been the assurance that at least we have the letters which had been written to us? What a sense of insecurity, of mystery, of darkness, settles down upon the day which railway strike or (may God avert it) Post Office strike has deprived of its daily delivery! The humblest officer in that great postal system of England is in fact (though he does not so call or so think himself) the benefactor of his country. Well may we hail you here, friends and brothers, this afternoon.

We would turn our meeting to account for something other than compliment. While we thank you, we would also thank God for you.

Three centuries ago there was no Post Office in England. Why, indeed, should there be, when so few people could write? People dwelt

apart, managed their own little dwellings, cared not for news of their country's welfare or their country's relations with foreign countries, bought and sold in their own little hamlets, travelled with their own goods to the nearest port or market, communicated by chance opportunities and at rare intervals with their own nearest and dearest, and heard, weeks and months afterwards, by the merest accident, of the very marriages, births, and deaths which were all in all to them. Kings and a few great nobles had their messengers, by whom they despatched communications vital to the peace of counties or countries. London and Edinburgh were a week apart as to tidings of battles or revolutions. Thus the world vegetated—thus the world slept.

How altered, how altered, is the face of existence—and you, friends and brothers, are instruments of the renaissance. I desire to magnify your office—for, in doing so, I know that I also quicken the pulses of your activity, of your alacrity, in your calling. I would have you look upon yourselves as the ministers of God to us all for good. When you are disposed to count the steps of your daily circuit, call it monotonous, call it mechanical, or call it servile, then I would have you think this again with yourselves: that you are messengers of Christ, ministers of all the churches. Telegraph and telephone may

at first sight be more wonderful—they possess something of the prestige of the supernatural—but I defy any one who has spent a day or an hour in going over the working of the General Post Office in London, or (in its measure) of the central Post Office of our great town of Cardiff, to say that miracle itself can produce a more speaking display of the beauty and power of one attribute of the God alike of nature and miracle—the attribute which He claims to Himself in Scripture, as the God of order, not of confusion—than that which is presented, quite as a matter of course, quite without one outcry either for admiration or for praise, in the daily ministration of that magnificent organization, the postal system—national, colonial, and international—of our great country, the centre of all the interests and all the enthusiasms and all the energies of the world.

I will bid you to think but of three of the departments of life to which you, in the exercise of a trying and laborious and often depressing service, minister.

(1) Think of it in its business aspect. What would happen if that daily sorting and stamping and carrying were but for one day intermitted? Why, the wheels of the world would be stopped by its stoppage. Liverpool, and Manchester, and Birmingham, and Glasgow, and London

itself, would suffer a paralysis of limb and brain and heart, the like of which is not to be found in hospital or asylum.

(2) Think of it in its family aspect. We need not go to the greater of life's joys or of life's sorrows—its occasional storms and tempests, its sometimes desolations, when the four winds from God's terrible wilderness smite the four corners and the house itself collapses. No, I would rather think, and bid you think, the gentler thoughts which belong to the communications passing week by week between the home—perhaps the village home, perhaps the secluded, far-away, isolated home—and the schoolboy son, or the servant son, or the sailor or soldier son, or the colonist son, or the exile son for fault or no fault of his—or, again, the daughter earning her bread and the bread of her mother in some distant home among strangers, whence her thoughts night and morning and noonday seek the rock whence she was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence she was digged. You, you are ministering to these sweetest and most beautiful instincts of nature as you tread your weary round and never dream that you are the ministering spirits, the very angels of God Himself, to a thousand unknown unsuspected men and women and children of one blood (nevertheless) with you.

(3) Its business aspect, and its family aspect—has not your work yet one more—its religious, its Christian, its Christ-like aspect?

Yes, those letters—that avalanche of letters in the office, or that bundle (heavy enough) of letters in the bag or on the shoulder—have an office quite beyond and above that of which we have yet spoken. Of course they unite divided lovers: of course they enable that sweetest of words, love, to breathe itself into souls pining and dying for lack of converse and communion with the far-away loved one. Let no man smile—no *man will* smile—if we speak of this as an office of heavenly ministry, to carry to their destination these messages of one to one.

Yet we take a step beyond even this, when we remind you of the work done by letters, not upon hearts only—precious though that be—but upon lives and upon souls.

O the influence breathed by letters upon solitary, straying, tempted lives! I do not think it is always the religious letter—strictly so called and ostentatiously so labelled—which does this work of works. No, there are letters—from mother, from sister, from brother, from friend—which even name not the name of God, and yet do Him service in the heart's heart of the receiver. There is a love, not named but breathed, which casts out the unclean spirit from its lodg-

ment in the castle of the soul. There is an influence, indefinable yet omnipotent, which brings back, into the life not unstained by evil, memories and aspirations and repentances prescribed in vain alike from the pulpit and by the Bible. It is a subtle but a potent spell which you weave for the young man—yes, for the man of hoar hairs—as you leave at the door of the house, which to you is but a number, that little square or oblong envelope which to you is just a folded paper and no more. Think of this—and let it consecrate your day's labour to a ministry not of man only but of God.

And if my words hitherto may seem to have sought out a few amongst us this afternoon, occasional rather than constant worshippers in our Cathedral, let me not fail to remind all of us—writers sometimes, if not sorters or deliverers, of letters—not only of the dignity, not only of the sanctity, but also of the responsibility of that gift, so common, so trivial today, once so rare and so exceptional, of uttering thoughts, from heart into heart, not by speech, but by marks and symbols on paper.

I need not here warn any one against corrupting by letters. That be far from any of us! That all of us would be ashamed and shocked even to contemplate as a possibility to be es-

chewed. And yet it is astonishing how much may be done even in this direction without exactly meaning, certainly without actually expressing, the evil. Hot thoughts, of inordinate affection or sinful passion, often let themselves (as we say) be read between the lines, where there is nothing obscene or impure to be deciphered. But, short of this, far short of this, there may be that irrepressible, that unconcealable worldliness, godlessness, of motive and spirit—that weighing and measuring of all conduct in worldly scales and by a worldly standard—that utter leaving out of religion, and of the recognition as well as the mention of God Himself—which is wonderfully contagious, infectious, catching, minds being such as all ours are through the original sin which is the curse of the offspring of Adam. Spread your letter, as you write it—as Hezekiah spread the letter which he received—before the Lord, by an act of sincere and honest self-recollection, ere you sign, ere you fold, ere you direct it. There are many letters for which the best post office is the fire. But the letter spread in its writing before the Lord shall carry, not death and not barrenness, but a sweet aroma of peace and blessing into the heart and the soul to which you address it.

‘A curious thought strikes me,’ Dr Johnson

said, a century and more ago, to his biographer—‘a curious thought strikes me—we shall receive no letters in the grave.’

Yes, this is one of the thoughts which make the state beyond death so bare and blank to our conception.

‘No letters?’ Then no information (is it so?) as to the state of the survivors—their health and wealth, their prosperity or adversity, their marriages and deaths, their joys and sorrows, their falls and risings again. It is difficult, when we just add to these the more public events which do not affect us with equal keenness, just because they are public, not private, but which yet interest us so profoundly, both as men and as patriots—it is difficult to imagine ‘that world’ as not in some degree unexciting, dreary, and dull. Yet the truth is unquestionable—‘we shall receive no letters in the grave.’ Abgarus, king of Edessa, might write his letter (were the tradition trustworthy) to Christ Himself in heaven: no post office for any price could transmit it. Letters are of the earth: between them and Paradise there is a great gulf fixed.

What other modes of communication, mesmeric or intuitive, may then be opened between the living and the departed, we know not and cannot know. It may be that on the whole it

shall be better for us that the screen should be massive and impervious : if it is a privation not to know the joys, yet more in number are the sorrows, of earthly existence. Could the spirits and souls of the righteous enjoy perpetual rest and felicity, if they were still conscious—impotent the while to relieve them—of the agonies and anguishes which convulse the flesh and the spirit of the left-behind ?

‘We shall receive no letters in the grave.’ Then let us so live as not to miss them. Let us have a life quite within and above, quite independent of, and extraneous to, the life of earth and time. Let us have so read and so written our letters, while we can, as to have no remorse for them in the world beyond death. And let us long for that day which shall raise us finally above these small expedients, gracious and beneficent as they are to us, of speech and writing, of post and telegraph, even of bodily co-existence and converse, and introduce us into a condition in which we shall think thought into mind without laboured intermediate of art and man’s device, being all one in the one Presence, God Himself being all in all.

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,
August 24, 1890.

XI.

TWO FALSE STANDARDS OF JUDGMENT.

2 Corinthians x. 12.

They, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

TWO faults are here—two perils of the soul—rife then at Corinth among the contemporaries of St Paul in the first age of the Gospel—still rife amongst us upon whom (in a more literal sense) the ends of the world are come.

I do not propose to try to reproduce to you this morning the extinct phenomena of this strange old church of Corinth, with its curious anomalies of doctrine and conduct, its spiritual vanities, credulous fancies, and fickle affections.

The words of the Bible, not least those of St Paul, are not dead words, but living. They are of all races and ages. In our real moods we feel them to be not of yesterday or of to-morrow—no, but of the hour and of the moment that is. May it be thus with us this morning,

while we try to read one of St Paul's riddles, as he tells of people who, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

At the first reading we might scarcely see any distinction between the two faults spoken of. 'Measuring themselves by themselves,' and 'comparing themselves with themselves'—where, we might ask, is the difference? A little thought perhaps will disclose it.

A man measures himself by himself, who makes himself his standard—who has no other, no higher, criterion, by which to estimate his own condition, mental, moral, or spiritual, than himself, such as he is, creature and product of a variety of circumstances, inheritor of a certain past, heir of an uncertain future. Such as he is, he is his own measure and canon, his own rule and line, to be applied to himself when he would know how he stands in relation to man or to God.

This habit of measuring self by self may arise from various causes.

It may arise from conceit. The man thinks himself perfect. Or, if not perfect—which no one says, or perhaps thinks—still sufficiently so for practical purposes. He needs no thorough remaking and remodelling—certainly he needs no bringing in upon him of a new type and a

new idea : a little improving will do all that is necessary ; he may still be his own measure, though the measure itself may have been a little scant or a little short, and may bear a little repairing to bring it up to statute and regulation.

But the measuring of himself by himself may have—often has—another explanation. Isolation will account for it. A man lives alone, does his own work, does not read, does not mix with others, never sees either self-denial or courage or patience or nobleness exemplified in life or action—how can he measure himself by any one or any thing but himself? how can he do more (if he does even that) than take account of his today in comparison with his yesterday, congratulate himself if he is a little less ill-tempered or a little less self-indulgent than he was, and set out again for a tomorrow which will have no whiff and no gleam of novelty as to its idea and its ideal?

Here are two possible explanations of the first of the two faults—a man measuring himself by himself. Conceit is one explanation, isolation is another. A third account of it might be that sort of sluggishness and stupidity of the moral sense which acquiesces in the thing that is, thinks it will do, hopes all will come right, just casts its four anchors from the stern and waits, without wishing, for the day. In this

state of mind, there is either no measuring—which is quite possible—or, at best, that self-measuring by the standard of self, which makes no stir at all within, and which leads the life no whither.

If this be at all descriptive of the character of the self-measurer, well can we see why St Paul should say that he does not ‘presume,’ or that he does not ‘deign’—for either rendering of the word is open to us, ironical in the one case, disdainful in the other—to make himself of the number. How palpably the opposite of that heroic soul which ‘counted not itself to have apprehended;’ of that onward-pressing race of enterprise which kept its goal ever in view, forgot the things behind and just made for the mark.

Self-measuring is one of the two faults, let us turn now to the other.

‘Comparing themselves with themselves, they are not wise.’

Here the singular has become plural. The standard of the individual has become the standard of a multitude. The man who, whether from vanity, or from isolation, or from indolence, makes himself his measure of duty and his measure of attainment and his measure of excellence, is now replaced by the man who compares himself with other men—yet, such is

the striking idiom of the original, not with other men on a large scale or by a thoughtful selection in which eminence should be the test, whether eminence of mind or eminence of character—no, compares himself with his own circle and his own little world such as chance or choice has made it. The men spoken of compare themselves with themselves after all, only the self which they make their measure is (so to say) a plural self, a composite self, a self of surroundings and circumstances, an ‘environment’ (to use the new word) of beings just like themselves, reflexions of their own thought, their own principle, and their own judgment.

The distinction is, I hope, clear—it ought to be so—between the two characters. We have passed from the self-contained man, the man of conceit and isolation and indolence, to the man who has a world, as he calls it and as it calls itself, and with that world compares himself, as to his thought, and as to his conduct, and as to his character, every day.

This is, or may be, a less unlovely person than the former. He is no solitary, and he is no pedant, and he is no misanthrope. He does not profess himself the one wise man, or the one important man, or the one perfect. He is willing to let in some light upon the self-life. But it is a limited light. It is the light of his

own little world. It may be a very little world. Some people—especially among the poor—pride themselves upon the littleness. They make it a merit not to go about houses. They never get beyond the narrowest circle, of household, family, relations, connexions. Men bound themselves by the workshop, the office, or the counting-house—women literally by the home. Even the wider, even the widest, world of any one person is still but a small one. Society itself, in the London sense of the word, is but a fraction of the nation—much more, of the race.

Yet within this fraction (larger or smaller) of the race multitudes of individual men and women are absolutely cribbed and cabined. They think within it, they judge within it, they act within it—worse still, they aspire within it. Not one idea comes to them but from it. Not one opinion, whether political or moral or religious, is ever formed or ever expressed by them but at its dictation. They never stand up for one down-trodden man or one unpopular cause. They tariff sins and virtues at its nod. They count anything ‘righteous overmuch’ which overpasses its limit of religious duties. They call any particular breach of the moral law heinous or venial according as their world condemns or condones it. Even in theology, even in worship, their little fraction of the

human race—the world it is for them—has its say and its veto, and they with it and in it.

This is no exaggeration of the thing that is. Tell me one single subject on which your opinion is not taken from your world—remembering that there is a religious world as well as a secular. Show me the man who dares to be independent—not for the sake of being so, but because he does not compare himself with others, but looks within or looks above for his estimate of men and things, and stands already, consciously and by choice, at that one judgment-seat where we ought to be and must be and shall be judged.

St Paul says that they who are described by either of these titles, self-measurers by self, or self-comparers with each other, 'are not wise.' He might have put it more strongly. A man might be unwise, though applying a right standard to himself, because he was condemned by it, because he did not live up to it. A man might be unwise whose judgment was weak, whose will was feeble, whose life had many inconsistencies, though his aim was high and his effort noble. But the man whose measure is self, or whose self-comparison is with other selves, as fallible and as prejudiced and as half-informed and as lazy-minded as the self-self, has no chance and no peradventure and no pos-

sibility of wisdom. He is on the wrong tack. He is in a labyrinth of error without a clue to guide him through it or out of it.

More or less the two faults are faults of us all. They are often found in one and the same person. A man is his own measure in some things, and compares himself with his world in other things. Many men are slaves of a passion or an appetite, and at the same time creatures and playthings of the world in matters of fashion and in matters of opinion. And if they escape both these perils, they may still be very far from wisdom. Still they may be quarrelsome, still they may be indolent, still they may be irreligious, unchristian, ungodly.

‘Measuring themselves by themselves, they are not wise.’

What is to be done ?

Evidently self (in this first clause) is the inordinate, the exaggerated, the overgrown thing. Self is here the thing which must be counteracted, combated, taught its place.

‘Measuring themselves by themselves,’ they must be taught to measure themselves by something else.

Almost anything will be a better standard. Almost anything must be invited to share the home of the being with self. Almost anything. If the man would read—if he would admit into

his mind samples of the really great and good—if he would live amongst the heroes of humanity in biography, in history, I had almost said in fiction—this must do something towards the disparagement and depreciation and at last the dethronement of self. Self may still be too strong for him in close fight, but self can scarcely hold its own as an object of admiration, still less of idolatry.

Better still if the man could become the associate, the companion, the friend, of some one whose life is a higher life, who does aim at something above earth, who does measure himself by a standard higher than the Adam nature, higher than the Fall.

Better still if the self-measurer could be induced to entertain the thought of a poverty, a suffering, a wretchedness surrounding him everywhere, and so much as to take that which was the first step of the mightiest of heroes towards becoming the legislator of the nations and ages, when (as it is written) it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

We want not—speaking in the language of the text—we want not the self-measurer to become the mutual comparer—it would be a paltry and a profitless advance for him. And yet there is a sense in which even this might be a gain to him.

But we must not speak so. We have imagined him taking a first step by letting in something else, anything else, upon the self of his sleep in death. And now we must take the two men of the text, each by the hand, and bid them rise to a life higher for them both. We shall bid them to rest in no earthly heroism, and to acquiesce in no human example of virtue. We shall carry them on, without pause or dallying, to the contemplation of One in the presence of whose beauty and glory all such minor excellences pale and fade away.

This is one—I say not the highest of all—of the influences by which Jesus our Lord took it upon Him to deliver man. He came to give us a vision of beauty, a presentment of glory, by which men should be made ashamed of their own meanness and baseness, and awed into the confession of a grace and a virtue so high above them that, if it had not moved and walked on earth, showing itself in human action and suffering, it would have simply astounded, or simply terrified, and exercised no practical power over the living and moving of men upon this earth which He created and on which He afterwards dwelt as that which needed to be shown what in His strength it yet might be.

O, when we look at Him, and at what flesh and blood, in the might of spirit and Godhead,

may yet be, it does seem wonderful that self should hold its own in any heart; that there should be one 'son of Adam, son of God,' contented to measure himself by himself, or to compare himself with his brother-selves, while there is on record an example so transcendent of the thing which man may be in the might of the Son of Man.

It is by putting ourselves out of the light of the Son of Man that we contrive to live such lives as those of the best of us. It is by coming back into that presence that we can alone appreciate self and the world as we ought to do.

But I do not find that example alone is enough for us. It may win admiration—we may see it in the Passion Play of Ammergau—thousands of our countrymen have done so this year—and we may come away, like the women from Galilee from the scene itself, who 'smote their breasts and returned'—but, after all, something else is needed to get into the breasts smitten, the hearts sorrow-stricken; and that is, not the memorial but the living presence—the presence in spirit, the presence of the holy Comforter given on the strength of the other, the historical presence.

So then, brethren, the upshot and the moral of our subject is this—

He who would rise out of the self-measuring,

he who would rise out of the mutual comparing, must do so in the might of a better standard, which is the example of Jesus Christ, and in the might of a nobler companion, which is, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, living and acting in the hearts of those who believe.

And then, lest there should be any idealizing or spiritualizing away of the living power which, after all, alone can avail anything in these spirits and souls of fallen people struggling through their appointed time till the change come, let us earnestly press the living much in prayer, in the study of the Bible, in holy Communion, by which body is given to this spirit, and by which men in flesh and blood are enabled to realize and to maintain that contact with heaven by which alone earth can be made to shine with that God who is Sun and Shield.

In that effort let us, brethren, who are here permitted to begin again our worship in the beloved Temple, join heart and soul while we have time. Soon shall we be gone, minister and people alike, where there is no sight and no hearing of earth—only the real thing, which is the spiritual and the divine. There shall these earthly meetings only be remembered in so far as they conduced to the nurture of the spiritual part of us by communion with the Eternal.

See that each service ministers to this end.

XI.] *Two False Standards of Judgment.* 153

See that it be a spiritual service—beautiful, delightful, because spiritual. Let us come together not for the worse but for the better. Let the beauty of the Lord God be upon us. Let us learn here to try ourselves by a spiritual standard—even by the example and by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And let us go forth in the spirit of this worship, to let our light so shine before men that it may glorify Him who kindled it—first on the earth, then in the heart—the Father, the Saviour, the Comforter—one God.

TEMPLE CHURCH,

October 19, 1890.

XII.

LAWFUL, NOT EXPEDIENT.

I Corinthians vi. 12.

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

I Corinthians x. 23.

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

IN one of these texts—I think, in both of them—St Paul is dealing with a subject which has long passed out of the region of practical morals. When he wrote, it was in the forefront of the battle between Christianity and heathenism. Idolatry was the religion of Corinth. A convert to the Gospel was confronted with it everywhere. He could not go to market, he could not sit at table, without running the risk of falling in with something which had formed part of a sacrifice. Was there contamination in

that very probable antecedent of the joint or of the dish?

We may smile at such a scruple. That we can do so is due in large part to St Paul. His vigorous intellect, his forcible language, settled the question. We have entered upon the inheritance of the good sense and the sound judgment which was thus early brought to bear upon a question which might have been almost as troublesome as that of caste in India. An idol, St Paul says, is a non-entity. It has no existence, *quâ* idol, in the nature of things. It is a log of wood, or it is a block of stone—no manipulation and no dedication can make it less or more. That is its place in the creation which God created, and no folly and no superstition can either add to that definition or take away from it.

How then can it have done anything to that joint of flesh, whether in the meat-market or on the dining-table, to have stood once before that non-entity, whether graceful or hideous in its form of image or statue, or even to have had the fire pass through it as it smoked upon that non-entity's altar? The idol is wood or stone still, the joint of meat is a piece of flesh still: the non-entity can neither receive sanctity nor communicate defilement: you may make your purchase or eat your meal, asking no question

for conscience sake. The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it: everything that is His is given to His children: nothing is to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving.

'All things are lawful for me.' It is needless to say—for he says it in the verse following the first text, and it would have been obvious if he had not said it—that he speaks of matters not evidently and essentially moral; that he speaks of the body in one aspect and not in another; in that use of the body which perishes with the using, not in that use of the body which must be given account of in the judgment. With that self-evident limitation, 'all things are lawful for me.'

But that abstract lawfulness, which is the liberty of the Christian, does not close the enquiry. 'All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient.' And the two texts give us two departments of expediency—it has an aspect towards myself, and it has an aspect towards other people.

Expediency is a term of reproach with some moralists. They associate it with such words as convenience, self-interest, and time-serving. Men have affected to banish expediency from politics as well as from ethics. They have thought to connect it with partisanship, with indifference to principle, with flattery of the

multitude, with greed of office, with facility of shifting between Yea and Nay.

All depends upon the thing with which you contrast expediency. Men who use it in reproach mentally contrast it with right. St Paul contrasts it with a widely different thing—law.

Expediency is capable (no doubt) of low uses. Caiaphas talked of expediency when he suggested the murder of Jesus Christ. 'It is expedient,' he said, 'that one man should die for the people.' Yes, of course the word is capable of low senses—it is a base word when it is contrasted with right.

But now hear how Jesus Christ used it. I will give you but two examples. See whether it is a low word then.

(1) 'Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it is expedient¹ for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.' 'Expedient'—expedient that he should be drowned rather—awful indeed the suggestion of an alternative unnamed!

(2) 'Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away; for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you.'

¹ Matt. xviii. 6, *συμφέρει*; St Mark has *καλόν ἐστιν*; St Luke, *λυσιτελεῖ*.

‘Expedient’ that the Comforter come—‘expedient’ that ye be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire!

By derivation the Greek word for ‘expedient’ is ‘conducive’ or ‘contributory’—and it says not to what. But in use it means conducive to good and not to evil—and it is so here.

‘All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.’

Religious teachers—notably persons who have made themselves or have been made by others popes of religious parties—deal much in positive precepts. Docile disciples come to them, and say, Rabbi, is it wrong to do this or that on Sunday? is it wrong to take part in this particular amusement? is it wrong to dance, or to see a play, or to have a bazaar for a charity? And the Rabbi answers, It is wrong. And the reply becomes a dogma of a school or a party—it is a ready-made test with many of a particular person’s Christianity. It may be a burden here and there, a trial to some, what is lightly called in such society a ‘cross,’ to conform to it. Some cannot rise to it: they break the rule, and have a bad conscience in doing so—for that is one of the mischiefs of multiplying laws—you multiply sins with them. To others it is a satisfaction, a self-satisfaction, to have risen to the height of it. And so it dureth for a

while—till another generation arises, with its fresh enquiry—its demand, Why is this, and who said it? and lo, the law of one generation, even of a party, is no longer the law of the next. It was very convenient while it lasted—but law, human law, most of all partisan law, is essentially ephemeral: Christian liberty, fenced and guarded by Christian expediency, this alone hath immortality—the God-inspired man, the man who is to write ten books, or one book, of the Bible, foresaw this, and laid down his rules accordingly.

How certainly would the man of 18th or 19th century religious party—I care not whether Evangelical, Tractarian, or Ritualist—have answered the question of the church of Corinth about the *εἰδωλόθυστα* in the form of precept. ‘Thou shalt on no account touch food that has been offered to an idol. It will provoke God to judge thee. It will require a special service of purifying and re-dedicating to avert the divine displeasure after such a profanity. If thou shouldest go to a heathen friend’s dinner’—but even this would have been prohibited—‘ask scrupulously, ask for conscience sake, Has this or this—art thou quite sure—not been part of a sacrifice? And if any uncertainty lurks in the answer, then eat not—for thy soul’s sake eat not.’

We go back with delight to St Paul, and

to that characteristic which makes St Paul's writings immortal. With St Paul there is a thing higher than law, just in proportion as principle is higher than precept—and that thing higher, nobler, grander than law is expediency. 'All things (in this class of things) are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient.' 'We were called,' he says to the Galatians, 'to liberty' ('for liberty' we might render it—or, with equal propriety, 'on the footing, basis, or groundwork of liberty')—only turn not liberty into licence: make not liberty an excuse for self-indulgence: let yours be a liberty thoughtful and religious: Christian liberty must be checked and guarded by another thing, which is Christian expediency. 'All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient.'

In the second and parallel clause of each text he points to two workings and leadings of Christian expediency.

(1) 'All things are lawful for me: but I will not be brought under the power of any.' There is an antithesis in the Greek, lost in the English. 'All things are lawful for me, but I will not be lawed-over by any'—'I will not be put under the law of any.' There is a fear of losing liberty in the very assertion of it.

I have a right to do this or that. Yes. I resent the dictation of pastors and teachers—

alas, too often, the loving wish and prayer of father or mother. I will form this habit—expensive I know it is, offensive to many about me I know it is—but liberty is my birthright, whether as an Englishman or as a Christian—I will have my way. The habit is formed. No doubt I could break it any day, at any moment, by the mere willing. The time comes when I would fain break it. A physician tells me it is injuring me—a dear friend asks it of me as a favour to give it up—the wife of my bosom dislikes, hates the habit—yes, I will break the bond—I will go forth and shake myself free!

The tale is thrice told, how even a trick, once formed, is a tyrant—how a habit, not in itself vicious, never to be confounded with moral matters, yet fastens itself upon the boy or the young man with links of steel—what cause he has to wish, later on, that he had listened to St Paul, when, refusing to impose a law where nature and nature's God had not spoken—on the contrary, saying in broad unmeasured terms, 'All such things are lawful'—he yet adds, in the tone of a resolution as manly as it is Christian, 'But I will not be brought under the power of any.'

Such is the aspect of Christian expediency towards oneself. The second text gives it another aspect.

(2) 'All things are lawful, but not all things edify.'

To edify is to build up. It is used repeatedly in Scripture as the opposite of pulling down. And this in reference to the moral and spiritual life. To edify is to improve, to benefit, to add to the welfare or comfort or Christian stability of another.

'Not all things,' even of the 'lawful' things, benefit other people.

You may feel yourself free to say, An idol is a non-entity, and therefore my sitting down at an idol-feast cannot do me either good or harm—the non-entitiness prevents that—'the thing nothing' cannot help, but neither can it hinder—if it does no good, it can do no harm.

Think again, St Paul says. Think of the effect of this spectacle, the Christian man sitting down to meat in an idol-temple—how will it affect other people?

But short of this—which St Paul, I think, tacitly forbids—take another case. You are dining with a heathen friend—for, if you are only to associate with Christians, in wicked Corinth, you must needs go out of the world. Some one says to you—another guest like yourself—as you sit at meat, 'I happen to know that that particular joint of meat was bought

from a heathen priest—it was part of his perquisite from an idolatrous sacrifice.’ You see, by his mentioning it in this emphatic way, that he has a scruple—which he takes it for granted that you will share. Now then, if you override that scruple, if you nevertheless eat of that dish, one of two things must follow. Either he will be shocked and outraged by your unscrupulousness—your influence over that person for good will be lost for ever; or else he will be emboldened—‘edified’ is St Paul’s half-ironical word for it, as though there were a bad as well as a good edification—to follow your example while his conscience is evidently (by his calling your attention to it) not enlightened to that sense of the intrinsic indifference of all such things; and so—it is an awful saying, as to the consequences of outrunning no less than of outraging conscience—the weak brother perishes, for whom (as for thee) Christ died.

Christian expediency then acts as a check upon Christian liberty by bidding us ask, not only, is it wrong to do so and so? but, what effect will it have upon myself—what effect will it have upon others—to do so and so? Shall I be shocking them, so that my influence will be lost to them? Or shall I be tempting them to follow my example—to do what I am doing—while they think it wrong?

The subject is wide and large in its application.

‘All things are lawful.’ Then take heed how you create sins. You have no right to speak where you are not quite sure that Christ has spoken before you. Distinguish between human dogmas and divine commandments. ‘You are bought for a price: be not ye slaves of men.’ Bring to book your dogmas—your rules about Sunday—your rules about amusements—your rules about habits and practices lying outside the pale of actual commandments. Set yourself free. Set others free. Learn to say boldly, ‘All things,’ except sins—and conscience tells me what sins are—‘all things are lawful.’ Never dare to make a new sin—whether it be about meat or drink—whether it be about ball, theatre, or card-table: that is not your business—that is not the way to set about even your crusades: ‘all things are lawful’—say that first.

And then add—‘But all things are not expedient.’

Many things have a captivating, an enthralling, an enslaving effect upon the man himself. A game, a pursuit, even an accomplishment, even a study, may make a slave of a man. You must not allow liberty itself to make a slave of you. It is not enough to say, There is

nothing wrong in it. No, but there may be harm in it—or at least harm for you. A man must look out for himself. A man who lives in the light of eternity will risk nothing in that far future. A man who lives, or desires to live, in the light of God, will be his own barometer: he will learn by experience what is good for him and what is bad as regards his relation to God—and he must act accordingly. ‘All things are lawful for me—*but*’—

It is a great mistake to misname things. You do harm by calling things unlawful which are only (is it not bad enough?) inexpedient. It never answers, in the long run, to pitch your nomenclature too high. You tell your son it is wicked to touch a game or a novel on Sunday. ‘Wicked’ is not the word for it—not exactly. You had much better have said, ‘I advise you not to do it. I am old and you are young—and I assure you it is not expedient.’ In a very high sense of the word—in St Paul’s sense, in Christ’s sense of the word—it is not expedient. Then you can never be found to have exaggerated. You have spoken within the mark, and if your son should hereafter, when he reaches your age, judge differently, he will never be able to say more than that opinions differ. ‘My father thought so and so, but I think otherwise.’

It is very foolish to exaggerate. When you

say, 'It is wicked to bet—it is wicked to play for sixpenny points—you open yourself to the retort, Do you never waste money by buying an expensive article of food when a cheap one would equally have satisfied hunger? do you never pay for a first-class ticket when a third would equally have brought you to your destination? do you not subscribe to a club when you have got a house? do you never buy a book when a circulating library would have lent it you?

There is no end to this creating of sins. Had you not better take St Paul's hint, and say, 'Yes, lawful I own—but how about expedient? If I cannot exactly say that it is unlawful to risk a shilling or a sovereign to make an evening lively to some old friend who would from long habit find it dull and dreary to play only for a pastime; yet I can say, in forming my own habits, I see the fearful consequences of gambling in ruined estates and extinguished families—see its dire temptations to fraud and robbery in humbler stations of life—think of the responsibilities of getting and having—think of the day when Jesus Christ must call His servants and reckon with them—how will this item and that look in that day when the 'Well done, good and faithful' will be the criterion of bliss and woe—then say, All things

may be lawful—this perhaps may be just lawful—but expedient—edifying—how about that?

There is an intrinsic superiority, in moral matters, of expediency (in the true sense) over law. The one involves thought, consideration, exercise of reason, balancing of consequences, willing sacrifice, motives of love to God and man. The other is just the looking at a statute, written or printed, with the penalty under it—the doing or refraining from a single separate act, the reason dormant in the matter, the motive ambiguous, the result indecisive as to the character and as to the soul.

O that all good enterprises had formed themselves on this estimate! O that there had been no whisper of the transparent fallacy, Wine is wicked! Whereas it should have been said, For thine own sake, be temperate—for thy brother's sake (if so it be) abstain. Then all had been well. Then had all bitterness and uncharitableness been banished from the enterprise, and love, love alone, love to God and love to man, would have written over its platforms and over its pulpits the alone true superscription—'All things are lawful—but all things are not expedient.'

TEMPLE CHURCH,

November 16, 1890.

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,

September 25, 1892.

XIII.

THE SANITY OF ST PAUL.

Acts xxvi. 25.

I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

THERE is no evidence like the witness. The man is more than his word. In matters of fact, at all events, no judge is satisfied with an affidavit. He must see the man. His look, his manner, his deportment under examination, is half, and more than half, of the testimony.

If by the nature of the case we cannot have the living man before us, then his letters, or the accounts of him given by contemporaries, become the next best help to forming an estimate of him.

It is so in matters of history. It is so in matters of faith.

The evidence of evidences to the truth of Christianity is Christ. Make what allowance you will for looseness of statement, for in-

accuracy of detail, for mistakes of time and place, of phrase or order, you have still enough left, in four biographies, and in general tradition friendly and unfriendly, to give you a good idea (to say the very least) of the character, of the personality, of Jesus Christ. And I believe that that character, that personality, which has impressed itself upon the mind and heart of mankind beyond the possibility of effacement or of material alteration, is beyond all comparison the most powerful evidence of the truth of the Gospel in its main features as a faith and as a religion.

Next to this, though far below it, is another evidence—itself too a personality, a character, and a life.

We commemorate today an event which has been called with no exaggeration the true Epiphany of Christ to the Gentiles. On this day more than eighteen centuries and a half ago, a notorious enemy and persecutor of the Christians was changed into a devoted servant, evangelist, eventually martyr, of Jesus Christ, by an occurrence which it is reasonable to ask friend and foe to give some account of, and of which he gives his own account in certain letters which Christians have bound up in their volume of Scriptures, and some of which are as certainly remains of the person in question as any letters

of Cicero or Pliny, of Gray or Cowper, are writings of the man whose name they bear.

The Epistle to the Galatians, the two Epistles to the Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Romans—by far the longest and most important of all the Epistles bearing St Paul's name—are unchallenged, practically unchallenged, as to their authorship. From them we could almost re-write the Gospels—they are probably the earliest written records of the Gospel fact and Gospel doctrine. From them (which is the present remark) we can draw a life-like and a truth-breathing picture of the character of the man who wrote them. He stands before us, even in bodily presentment, as the very Saul of Tarsus, as the very Paul the Apostle, that he looked and was to his contemporaries. His very faults are not hidden. The innermost life is unveiled. No forger could have tracked, no forger could have dared to write down, the marvellous surprises of alternation and vicissitude of thought and feeling which those four letters (if they were all the letters) disclose to the reader. The man is there.

And of course we must let him give his own account of himself. He must tell us how he came, having been what he was, to be what he is. We must listen. If we accept his account,

we must accept Christianity with it. If we doubt, if we challenge, his account, we must give our reasons. By the nature of the case, he has it all his own way in making the statement. He alone could know the story if it is true. It is a wonderful story, this of his conversion. There is something of the supernatural in it. That light above the brightness of the sun—that voice speaking in the Hebrew tongue—that sight of a Person—that remonstrance as concerning deeds done on earth yet seen in heaven—all this is strongly tinged with the miraculous, and it is also necessarily out of the knowledge of any one except the narrator.

His conviction of the truth of the story is beyond question. His life is changed by it. Prejudices born with him—opinions maintained and fought for into mature manhood—acts repugnant to his nature done for conscience sake in the way of persecuting—all these flung behind him, trampled upon, bitterly repented of; and a diametrically opposite course entered upon—a life of devotion to a new cause, a life of absolute obedience to a new Master, a life of efforts and sacrifices and sufferings beyond the example even of fellow-believers, a life adhered to in the face of privations and perils and plottings innumerable, and with the probable prospect of martyrdom to close and crown it—

it is impossible to gainsay the reality of the conviction which mastered him: true or false, it was a part of him: who gives his life gives all, enemies themselves being his judges.

St Paul's Epistles are evidences—but it is because St Paul himself is a witness. Examined and cross-examined in the world's witness-box, he has stood, and he stands, the test. Sincerity, truthfulness, earnestness, conviction, consistency—these are written on the face, these breathe in the man. He is a difficulty, he is an embarrassment, he is a stumbling-block, to the sceptic. The infidel must upset him somehow, and it is tolerably clear where his one chance lies. The incredibility, on any evidence, of miracle, as contradictory to uniform experience, was a *dictum* which satisfied one age, and survives perhaps tremblingly into another age, but is seen by the logician to involve that begging of the question which bears fallacy on the forehead: confute the testimony if you can, but to foreclose and preclude and silence it is a mere confession of weakness.

And so the modern sceptic takes a leaf out of Festus's book, who blurts out from the judgment-seat a scoff somewhat needlessly softened down in the English rendering: 'Thou art mad, Paul; all that learning'—a name which the rough Roman gives not to literature only but to

the plainest argument also when it stands in his way—‘all that learning is turning thee mad.’

‘Did it ever strike you,’ asks the modern sceptic, voluntary or involuntary, ‘that St Paul was mad?’

Yes, it has struck me a thousand times as the only tenable standing-ground for your otherwise untenable incredulity—and I have gone into it. I have read and re-read the four letters of which your own scepticism cannot seriously challenge the genuineness. I have read them chapter by chapter, saying to myself at the beginning of each chapter, ‘Remember, St Paul was mad—now listen to the ravings.’ I have thought with myself, ‘Given the madness—how would it express itself?’ Take a topic or two by way of example—or take the general tenor of the style and the subject, the points dwelt upon and the points slighted, the spirit breathed and the spirit recommended, the answer given to the question of questions, Which is the great—and which the next greatest—commandment?

Take a topic or two—then take the tone and the tenor—try each on the hypothesis of madness, or of that sort of enthusiasm which is nearly akin to it—and tell us the result.

There were certain practical topics afloat in the early churches, on which they naturally looked for advice to the particular Apostle who

had been their Evangelist. I will mention three.

One was that of marriage.

It must have been constantly happening that a Christian convert was already united in marriage to a heathen. What was to be done? It was terrible to be unequally yoked with an infidel. To hear the holy name blasphemed day by day. To have no sympathy on the most sacred and intimate of all subjects with the wife of the bosom, with the husband of the youth. To have children educated in infidelity, and no right and no freedom to teach them the way of salvation. What was to be done? What would the 'Paul beside himself' have counselled in this emergency? Assuredly to separate; to have no commerce and no converse with the infidel—least of all in the most intimate of all relationships; to shake off the dust from the feet, and begone. And what, as a matter of fact, does he counsel? He evidently treats it as a case not expressly provided for by the general rule of the indissolubleness of marriage. He has no commandment of the Lord. He speaks, not the Lord, when he advises to stay if you can, only to go if you must. You may be the means, Christian wife, Christian husband, of saving him or her—stay if you can.

But how would the 'Paul beside himself' have gone on to advise? Would he not have said, So sacred is marriage, that you must remain at all costs and all risks—at the risk of perpetual discord—at the cost of forcing yourself upon the one who will have none of you—at the cost of following him with cries and with importunities—at the cost of tarrying at the door of his isolation, and forcing the door which will not open? The real St Paul says, Stay if you can; but, if the unbeliever depart, or if the unbeliever dismiss, there is no bondage in such cases.

I call that the language of soberness and a sound mind. I call that the opposite of fanaticism on a subject easily lending itself to its influence.

Take another topic—that of slavery.

The 'Paul beside himself' would have been an emancipationist *vi et armis*. He would have said, Slavery is a condition abhorred of God—antichristian in its very idea—let us have a servile war to exterminate it. The 'Paul beside himself' would certainly have said to the convert slaveholder, Emancipate: to the convert slave, Run away. How does the real St Paul deliver himself on this matter? He says to the one, Free man, thou art Christ's slave: he says to the other, Slave, thou art Christ's freedman. There is a spiritual equality nobler and grander

than any that is civil and social. If the opportunity of emancipation is given thee, avail thyself of it: do not pretend to think slavery a better state than freedom: that would be fanaticism, that might be the doctrine of a 'Paul beside himself'—the real St Paul stops well short of it. Meanwhile he says to the Christian master, Thou too hast a Master in heaven: to the Christian bondman, Serve from the heart, as seeing Christ in it all: serve not the less but the more thoroughly because thy master and thou are brethren: let time work: let the Gospel leaven spread—hurry it not—it may take eighteen centuries to pass a world-wide Emancipation Act—shake not the sands—jog not the arm of a Providence which will hasten it in its time.

You may say St Paul should have been bolder—more imperious in edict: you cannot say that he was beside himself—an enthusiast, a visionary, a fanatic.

If I do not take a third example, it is because we spoke of it recently in another connexion—the social difficulties arising out of idolatry.

The Christian convert was always coming across things that had been or might have been portions of sacrifices. He could not buy in the market, he could not sit at a festive table, without running the risk of purchasing or partaking

of meat that had stood before an idol. The 'Paul beside himself' would have made this the text of a diatribe on faithfulness. Whatever you do, he would have said, you must keep yourselves from idols. Duty to Christ requires that you should go nowhere where such an accident can happen. Decline all invitations to unbelieving friends. If you find yourself in a dubious house, ask every possible question for conscience sake. Say as each dish is handed to you, Can I be quite certain—quite certain—that this has no particle about it of an εἰδωλόθυτον? Spread right and left the suspicion—communicate the anxiety—it is as much as your life is worth to let such a possibility of defilement assail you.

And what says the real St Paul? He goes to the principle. 'An idol is nothing.' It can communicate neither good nor evil. To have stood before an idol can involve no infection and no contagion in the innocent flesh or fruit or vegetable. Ask no questions for conscience sake—for there is no religion in the matter.

And does he stop there—with a gospel of absolute freedom without an 'if' or a 'peradventure?' There is a right and a wrong, he says with wonderful discrimination, even in this indifferent thing. Your own conscience may be free—but how about your neighbour's? He

may scruple where you do not. If, knowing or suspecting this, you trample down the alternative—if you urge liberty to its extreme, and ridicule or condemn the imperfect enlightenment which hesitates—then you either tempt another to follow where he cannot as yet safely go, or you incur the charge of presumption on your own part, and bring in the frightful confusion of being spoken evil of for that for which you are giving thanks.

It is scarcely possible to imagine a more sensible, a more wholesome, treatment of a network of questions of casuistry than that which here presents itself in the practical ethics of St Paul.

We have left ourselves no room for the second part of the subject—that of the general tone, in this aspect, of the man whose sanity is the question.

It is quite true that St Paul's innermost life was a hidden life. From the moment when he saw Jesus Christ, there was established a relationship and an intercourse and a communion with which no stranger could intermeddle, and which he himself could only describe in the all-embracing phrase, 'To me to live is Christ.' His definition of a Christian was, A man in Christ. With Him dead, with Him risen, with Him ascended, with Him already in heaven.

This kind of union with One out of sight gave an elevation, gave a dignity, gave a sanctity at once and a royalty, to the earthly being, nowhere else to be found, and not to be diluted or explained away for the sake of being level to the comprehension of men whose one thought and one boast is the practical. Christianity is Christ—and it would not be Christianity if its seat and its home were not heaven.

It is easy to see how this kind of religion would fare in the hands of a fanatic. The 'Paul beside himself' would have lived in the clouds. By comparison at least, he would have disparaged morals. He would have branded as 'legal' all that spoke of duty. His aim would have been to idealize and to spiritualize everything. To dwell upon relative duties, to enter into particulars of conduct, to mention such things as filial obedience or social propriety or congregational order or charitable collections or church hymnody, would have been regarded as the sacrifice of spirituality, the postponement of the vital to the formal, the hiding of the light of life under the bushel of the earthly and the temporal.

But who can read an Epistle of St Paul without being conscious of the proportion of its parts, of the balance of its topics, as between principle and practice, between the life out of

sight and the life in sight, between the touch which moves and the movement which is the consequence? What that is human does St Paul count alien? Was there ever a combination so harmonious between plainness of speech and depth of thought? The mystic ladder had its top in heaven, but its base was upon earth, and the angels of God ascended and descended upon Jesus Christ the way and the communication.

The writings are in all hands, and those times have been the best for the Church which have made the most of them. Words of truth and soberness are there spoken and written. God has there joined together the two elements of all true religion, the divine and the human, the revelation of Himself as the life and light of men. Let not man put them asunder—these two. The human without the divine has lost its zest and its sparkle: the divine without the human shines idly and unmeaningly in a heaven very far off.

We have described the real St Paul as a witness—a witness to fact and truth in his testimony of Jesus Christ. Is that testimony yet borne in us? Has it convinced, has it converted, has it consecrated each of us? A day is coming which will try each man's faith and each man's life of what sort it is. It may come soon

and suddenly to each one. When it is revealed, it is revealed in fire. Already we feel that fire in the visitings and searchings of heart which come to all by turns in the night-season, when a voice speaks and says to us, Thou art the man—when a hand strips off from us the masks and the veils, the wrappings and the cerecloths, of the self-flattery and the self-deception, and compels us to stand face to face, by anticipation of an hour more awful still, before the great white throne and Him that sits thereon. ‘I will thank the Lord for giving me warning’—that I be not taken quite by surprise when the last change comes.

TEMPLE CHURCH,

January 25, 1891.

XIV.

CONTEMPT OF THE PLEASANT LAND.

Psalm cvi. 24.

Yea, they thought scorn of that pleasant land.

‘WE have sinned—we and our fathers’—is the keynote of this pathetic and plaintive Psalm. We may call it historical, but that does not make it a thing of the past—it belongs to all time. Israel in the wilderness is only (in other words) man in life. It is scarcely a parable: certainly it needs no interpreter but the memory and the experience and the conscience of each reader and hearer.

We may count up, I think, seven separate sins in this gloomy catalogue—and the text is the fourth of them. Thus its place makes it the central sin of the whole group: it is also peculiar, unique, in its character. ‘They thought scorn of that pleasant land.’

The pleasant land spoken of was Canaan. The promise of that country was given to Abra-

ham, the father of the race, at his first call, and repeated again and again to him and his descendants. Yet to him and to them no present possession was given—no, not so much as to set a foot on. He had to purchase of former inhabitants a burying-place for his dead wife.

For 450 years—from Abraham to Moses—the promise was in abeyance. But faith kept it in mind. The promise was the heirloom, as its fulfilment was the hope, of the race. ‘Bury me in Canaan’ was the last request of one patriarch dying in Egypt. ‘When the day of fulfilment dawns, carry up my bones with you,’ was the solemn injunction of another. It was on the strength of this promise that the chosen nation, when at last deliverance came, turned its face and its steps in one direction rather than another. To think scorn of the pleasant land which was the one hope of their ancestry and the very goal of their country’s race, was more than a single act of rebellion, it was high treason against their nationality, as well as base ingratitude towards their God. In some true sense, therefore, this one sin had all their other sins in it—it not only crowned, it contained them all.

That pleasant land—that ‘land of desire’ as the margin gives it—is described in glowing terms in more than one passage of Deuteronomy. ‘The Lord thy God bringeth thee into

a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out in valley and hill; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and figtrees and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.' 'The land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.'

The picture is beautiful. To think scorn of such a promise, if we knew nothing of human nature around and within, would seem an incredible stupidity: yet look at the story as it unfolds itself there, in the pages of that divine because most human Bible, and wonder ceases, all becomes natural, we can see ourselves in each page and each line of it.

For Israel in Egypt, nay, for Israel in the wilderness, that pleasant land lay far away in the distance. For more than four centuries it had been a tradition, a name, a dream, to them—

practially as unreal as a thing in the clouds. And, as their prospect was dim and shadowy, so their retrospect was but too real and too substantial. Now that the wormwood and the gall of the house of bondage, with its compulsory toil, and its stubble for straw, and its taskmaster's lash, was no longer a thing of the present, there came back to them the memory of the sensuous luxuries which had solaced the degradation—there at least they could sit by the flesh-pots and eat bread to the full. 'We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt for nothing ; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick'—how unlike this bare monotonous desert, with its scanty and precarious supply of water, and its wearisome daily miracle of the insipid unappetizing manna.

With such experiences pressing upon the very senses, there was neither mind, heart, nor soul, in them, to say, The discipline is good for us. The keen air of mortification is bracing us for a safe enjoyment. The stern voice of law is first awing us into reverence, that then in due season we may be ripe for a revelation of love, a Father guiding us with His eye, and breathing into us the gentle persuasion of His Spirit. 'No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous'—'afterward' is the 'peaceable fruit'—seedtime and harvest lie wide asunder.

Even when the pleasant land sent a specimen of itself by the searchers—the heavy cluster of grapes borne between two upon a staff, with the figs and the pomegranates—it was accompanied by an ill report of the stature of its inhabitants and the fortification of its cities: no peaceable, no certain possession was before them: hard fighting and late resting was all that could be looked for—and no ‘pleasant land’ could fully repay the hardships and the struggles by which it must be purchased. They thought scorn of it.

The figures of Scripture, the types of Scripture, the parables of Scripture, are capable of many applications. Canaan, the pleasant land, might be made a type of this life. Battles and sieges, wars and fightings, enemies put out not all at once but by little and little, an imperfect possession and a constant dwelling among foes, this was the condition of the chosen people in Canaan, and it is a true account of the Church’s condition in the earth and of the Christian’s condition in the Church.

But there is another reading of the type—the commoner reading, and a legitimate as well as a beautiful one. By it the Red Sea is baptism, and the wilderness is the life of earth, and the river Jordan is the dark stream of death, and Canaan is the promised land of eternity and of heaven.

It is thus that I would read the parable to-day, and dwell for a few moments on the words of the text as descriptive of the true feeling of too many Christians towards that in which we all profess our faith as the life everlasting or the life of the world to come.

They thought scorn of that pleasant land.

Ours is a freethinking and it is an outspoken generation. It is by no means uncommon to hear men say now, Give me earth and I will give you heaven. I cannot realize, and I see no beauty in, the life of that world. You tell me that it has streets of gold and gates of pearl. It is an orientalism of exaggeration which conveys to me no meaning at all. If it did convey a meaning, it would be an unattractive one. I greatly prefer the Old Testament phraseology. I can understand a land of wheat and barley, of fountains and streams, which God cares for, and upon which His eyes are open from the beginning to the end of the year. Such a land, with the addition of a wiping away of tears from all eyes and a cessation of pain and grief and death, speaks for itself. But you have made it so figurative, so metaphorical, so grotesque, that I cannot admire and I cannot long for it.

Or again, if you had told me that there I should see again my loved and lost ones—that there I should renew all the relations and all the

affections of earth, in a condition over which change and decay and temptation and death should have no power; if you could guarantee to me an exemption from all that has troubled and spoiled this life, and give me back love in its beauty, and youth in its bloom, and coexistence in its perfect peace and perfect unity—this I could have realized, this I could have desired, this I could have lived for.

Or, once again, if you could have promised me quite for certain that there a more perfect rule should have presided, that there the present antagonisms of vice and virtue should be no more, that there there should be no question as to the omnipotence of divine love—I mean, as to the supremacy of Deity over evil, or as to the facility of doing right without let or hindrance, without struggle and without effort—and if you could have added to this a little, ever so little, of bodily comfort and animal enjoyment—a little, ever so little, of social, political, intellectual interest, to break the monotony and to relieve the tedium and to tone down the transcendentalism of an existence all soul, all spirit—then I could listen with attention to the promise; I could at least accept the offer of a heaven thus constituted, as the best thing possible in the circumstances, or even as better, intrinsically, than the alternative of a painless annihilation.

It is too true, brethren,—confess it and lament it with me—that we do know but little of that world after death of which nevertheless it is written that Christ brought to light, lighted up, life and immortality by His Gospel. I cannot realize the Apocalyptic gates and streets—the foundation stones of one jewel each, or the angels at each gate of the single-pearl portal. A city of which the length and the breadth and the height are equal does not present to me any apprehensible idea. I read nothing about the social life of the long future, or even as to the mutual recognition of earth's most dearly loved relations. I suppose that much is left to the instincts of nature on such topics as these. I am sure that whatever is then and there felt as necessary or felt as desirable will be provided by Him who cares for us and knows our frame. I cannot fill up these gaps, nor have I any conclusive answer for those who say, If this or that be missing—if such or such a thing be not a feature of that life—if (for example) there be any breaches then in the family circle, or any absences then of friends here loved and trusted—in short, if there be a judgment, which means the putting of differences—or (in any sense whatever) a second death or a lake of fire—then for me let the life of the world to come not be—let me stand outside with those

whom I have here delighted in and loved and lived for.

‘They thought scorn of that pleasant land.’

I can see many things to account for this. I can suggest perhaps a few things in correction of it.

Theologians and mystics have so described that land as to make it unlovely.

They have painted it to the manly and the vigorous, to the large-hearted and the active-minded, as a world of absolute repose, of perpetual quiescence. They have painted it to the feeble and the invalid and the languid and the weary as a scene of perpetual devotions, of a day never clouded and a night as bright as the day—of a praise never silent, a sabbath never ending, and a congregation never breaking up. The one kind of men demanded an activity which is absolutely refused them; the other a repose, spiritual as well as physical, which is resolutely shut out.

All these descriptions (I need hardly say) are quite conjectural. Scripture tells of a new heaven and a new earth, and expressly adds in explanation this particular—‘wherein dwelleth righteousness.’ How can ‘righteousness dwell in a land of mere inertion, mere torpor, or even of unintermitted praise and song? Piety might dwell there, quietism might dwell

there, love might dwell there, if love were mere feeling—but how righteousness, which is, being interpreted, not the absence of wickedness, but, the fulfilment of relations? Does not the very choice of the word suggest to us, though without detailing, a multitude of relationships, old perhaps as well as new, which shall give full scope to all the energies and all the activities which have here been coerced and counteracted alike by the weakness of the flesh and by the unwillingness of the spirit?

We cannot tell what shall be there—but we can say with some confidence that a God of love will not condemn His loved ones to an immortality of uselessness, relieved only by a monotony of adoration. We expect—though we can give neither verse nor chapter for it—that with the dropping of this reluctant, this often languid, this often aching body, there shall come a freshness and a freedom and an alacrity which shall make even the interval between death and resurrection something very different, even in point of vigour, from the experience of earth. ‘Put to death,’ St Peter says of Christ, ‘in flesh’—in reference to the mortal body—but (in the very same moment, as we read him) ‘quickened in spirit’—endued with a new vitality, enabling Him to soar at once, or to descend at once (for we enter not into such niceties) to

preach to 'spirits in prison,' to whom He could not have ministered while He was clogged and hindered by mortal flesh.

The Christian too, delivered from the bondage of the flesh, may have certain ministries opened to him—even in the intermediate state between death and resurrection—to spirits like himself—spirits of the blessed, or spirits awaiting judgment. And when once that intermediate period has been lived through, and a 'body' (as St Paul still calls it, while protesting against its identity of form or matter with the body that died)—when once a 'body' has been assigned to it, as it pleases God, for new work with new capabilities, then we can set no bounds to the expansion and the exhilaration of services opening in magnificent vista before him—services over which space and matter may have no control whatever—services to new spheres and new worlds, when earth and all that is therein shall have been burned up.

They thought scorn of that pleasant world. Yes, perhaps they might think scorn of the land of the pietist and the religionist who limits his conception to the mildest and the dreamiest of earth's worships, pictures to himself and to them a perpetual congregation, in dress and posture much like this—caution us as he may against thinking so—singing hymns and anthems in per-

petuity, or prostrate in unimaginable organisms before a throne which he takes pains to call invisible:—they can scarcely think scorn of a land such as Scripture leaves room for without attempting to depict or describe it—a land which the Lord God of Omnipotence cares for, and upon which His eyes of inspiring love are open from one end of a year and from one end of a millennium to the other.

Here is a land which no man can think scorn of: no, not the statesman, who has one little empire for his concern, and but the thousandth or millionth part of that for his individual management: no, not the philosopher, whose telescope and whose microscope cannot be taken with him when he dies, but who reads here of skies and worlds visible to the naked eye then in illimitable perspective: no, not the philanthropist, whose care has been here for the sanitation of dwellings, the ventilation of prisons, the institution of hospitals, or the regulation of reformatories, but whose scope of activity may then stretch itself to unimagined worlds, and whose energy may be the minister of God for good to races yet unnamed and generations yet unborn.

No, he cannot think scorn (whatever else he may do) of that pleasant land, even while we deal but in negatives or deal in conjectures.

Amongst all negatives and all conjectures, expanding the vision of the great future without stint or limit, we have one certainty and one positive—and with it we conclude.

We draw this last thought from a single verse of the Revelation of St John. ‘His servants shall serve Him—they shall see His face—His name shall be in their foreheads.’

Whose servants? whose face? whose name? Look above—you will find the answer in that great combination—‘God and the Lamb.’ Yet not their servants but His servants—not their faces but His face—not their names but His name.

O wonderful unity of the Divine Trinity! ‘Like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say, there be three Gods or three Lords.’ ‘God in Christ in the Holy Ghost’ is the all comprehending formula—God revealed once for all in Christ, God in Christ revealed in the Spirit to the individual soul as its Lord and its God. ‘His servants shall serve Him.’ O pleasant land! in which this shall at last be possible—possible to that which is now flesh and blood—possible to the weak and the frail and the here sin-laden.

Yes, when there is no longer a devil to tempt

or a mind to doubt or a soul to faint or a flesh to betray—when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have clad itself in immortality—then shall service be willing, constant, joyous—then shall the great Will be done as it is now done by angels in heaven, excelling in strength, hearkening without delay or questioning to the voice of His word.

‘They shall see His face.’ Not as now, far away in the great heaven—not as now, for a moment at a time, in some spasm of realization, then lose the sight again for days and weeks and years: they shall see it then unveiled, in its beauty—as it is written, ‘We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.’

‘And His name shall be in their foreheads.’ Here they have had it in their hearts. Sons of God, they have had a veil over the sonship—then it shall be manifested. Then there can be no risk of hypocrisy in confessing: they are there because they are His—as it is written, ‘The earnest expectation of the creature is waiting here for the manifestation (unveiling) of the sons of God.’

Who now shall dare to think scorn of that pleasant land? God is there—there in a sense in which He is not here. ‘Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty,’ as He can only be seen in ‘the land that is very far off.’

Who shall speak of that land in a tone half of condescension—‘Yes, if I must go hence, I will consent to go thither?’ Shall any one indeed find entrance there, who can only say, I will not refuse—I have no objection?

Learn betimes a different tone and a different estimate. Enter the presence-chamber now with the blood of Jesus: enter it now by faith: realize it, live in it: then will you say, ‘O send forth Thy light and Thy truth—let them lead me, and bring me to Thy holy hill and to Thy dwelling.’ Lord, I am not worthy that I should come under Thy roof: but Thou hast come here under mine: now ‘open Thy gate of love, and let me in.’

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,
March 1, 1891.

TEMPLE CHURCH,
April 12, 1891.

XV¹.

THE THREE WITNESSES—CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN, AND CHRISTIANITY.

John xvii. 21.

That the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.

THIS is one of those delightful passages of Scripture in which a boundless expansion is given to the prospects of the Gospel.

It is not always so.

Great things are written here and there in the Psalms and the Prophets, as to the extension of the knowledge of God to nations ignorant of Him. 'All the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and be turned unto the Lord; and all the kingdoms of the nations shall worship before Him.' 'The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'

Still, even in the glowing pictures of the most evangelical of the Prophets, it is easy to see

¹ Preached on Hospital Sunday.

that to the inspired man (though not to the inspiring Spirit) this magnificent prospect was to a great extent the glorification of the national Israel—it was through the portal of Judaism that all who would find God must make their way. The promiscuous admission was a secret not yet told: it was one of God's secrets reserved for the fulness of time. To St Paul it was a 'mystery' in the Scripture sense of that word, which is always a 'secret told.'

The paradox of one age is the truism of the next: it is so in science, it is so in morals, it is so in religion. To us it is a far greater mystery that one nation should once have been privileged, than that all nations should eventually be equalized, in the knowledge and favour of God.

There are some expressions even in this Chapter which look like exclusiveness. 'I pray for them, I pray not for the world,' has a somewhat harsh sound. It needs at least a moment's reflexion to show us that the real meaning is, 'I am not praying now for the world'—a very different thing. It needs the correcting light of such sayings as that of St John, 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' It needs at least the explaining comment of the text, which gives this

as the ultimate end and aim of the dealing of Christ with the Church—

‘That the world may believe that Thou didst send me.’

The poor ‘world’—not poor in its own sight, but poor, even to beggary, in the sight of God; poor in its wealth, poorer in its pleasures, poorer in its satisfactions, poorer still in its pride of life—no, it is not disregarded, it is not left out of sight, in the thoughts or in the prayers of Jesus Christ. It has a great and a glorious future, towards which, although far in the distance, this strange present, this unintelligible Providence, is all moving on and on: Christians themselves are but first-fruits (St James says) of God’s creatures—and if the first-fruits are holy (St Paul argues) the lump is also holy.

We must wait and hope—we must also watch and pray. There is a terrible waste of precious gifts, precious lives, precious souls (we must fear) also, in the way to it: we ourselves must tremble lest we be wasted and cast away in the mighty march towards the great consummation: there is no fate and no caprice in these dread issues—we hold them, each man for himself, in the two hands: but there is vindication, there is justification, of the works and ways of God, in the conviction that His world, not one fragment or atom of it, is His

care and His concern ; that, though it has lost itself, and though its recovery is beset with difficulties, yet over deserts and mountains He is seeking and searching His lost one ; and if so be that He find it—and infinite love shall not always or for ever be baffled—He shall rejoice more over that one world lost and found than over the ninety and nine in His universe that went not astray.

‘That the world may believe that Thou didst send me.’

We will ponder together for a few moments this morning the chief influences which are working to this end. The immediate context names one of them. But it involves at least two others.

1. And the greatest and most powerful of these influences is evidently this—Christ Himself.

Some might say, the character of Christ. And there is great truth in so speaking. But is there not also something a little chill and dull and lifeless, even perhaps a little assuming and patronizing, in that selection of one thing about Christ for mention, rather than of Christ Himself, when we speak of the chief influence drawing the world to faith ?

‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth’—not any one single thing in me or about me, but I myself—‘will draw all men unto me.’

We might enumerate the features which compose His character—His truth, and His holiness, and His wisdom, and His charity, and His patience, and His compassion—and yet fail to magnetize the ear that hears or the will which is the man.

It is not the approving sentiment, which confesses that each of these qualities is excellent, and that the combination of them in one Person is extraordinary, and that the character thus presented is unique in history and beyond the manner of man—it is not this, thus stated at any rate, which made an assembly of working men lift the hat (we recall an impressive incident) at the name of Jesus, as though in anticipation of a time when the world shall believe. It is Jesus Himself—the Person such as He is—such as history paints Him, with as certain a presentation as it makes of any historical person, king or sage, patriot or hero, saint or martyr—it is the Person, such as He lived and spoke and felt and suffered, cared for others and helped them, and at last died—it is this which touches and moves and stirs, awes and sobers and solemnizes, kindles and elevates and inspires, rouses within the first question, ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ and then the second question, sequel to the first, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’

We will not say, the character of Christ—

for that sounds like dissecting and analyzing—and we will not even say, the person of Christ—for that suggests doctrinal questions, of the two natures and their combination—we will rather name Jesus Christ as the influence of influences upon the world not yet Christian. We will think with ourselves how He Himself *has* influenced the world of the past and of the present, so far as it has been influenced, in the direction of a personal, effectual, transforming Christianity. We will set before the mind's eye the process, as it has been exemplified ten thousand times, by which, in sickness and sorrow, in distress and anguish, in shame and self-shame, in the near prospect of death and judgment, Jesus Christ has been made to the soul a reality, and a presence, and a power—seen as the Man of sorrows, seen as the sinner's Friend, seen as the Lamb of God bearing and taking away the sins of the world—the same still, the same for ever, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.

O the futility of that 19th century Gospel which takes and which leaves, at its will, of the word and the work, of the humanity and the deity, of the central Person! Or which throws Him into the background, behind His own sayings of wisdom, behind His own precepts of living. Or which consigns to a region of doubt

and peradventure the very facts of His life, the very reality of His resurrection. Or which so rounds and smooths and polishes, alike the record and the thing recorded, as to take out of it the whole point and the whole zest and the whole charm of the faithful saying, worthy, because capable, of all acceptance, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am chief.'

'That the world may believe that Thou didst send me.'

2. Christ is the first influence--the second is the Christian. The text points specially to the second.

The world not yet Christian must see if it is to believe. Far above out of its sight is the Saviour in heaven. It is true--we have said it--that there is in Jesus Christ that to which the world's conscience responds. But the difficulty is, to present Him to the conscience.

This is that office of witnessing, which so often takes grotesque and unmannerly forms, only because it will not see itself in its simplicity. The Christian is just the presentment of Christ to the world.

It is said many times in Scripture that the world hates the Christian. It resents the reproof which light is to darkness. This is one aspect. But there is another.

‘The child grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men.’ There is a grace in the Christian character, which is not exemplary only but influential.

The Lord prays for unity, as the influence which shall win the world. He speaks of the unity of Christians—but the same force lies in what we may call the unity of the Christian.

What a wonderful creation is the Christian! The world had seen nothing like it—till Easter—till Pentecost.

The new man was created in the rich man’s tomb—when God quickened Jesus.

And he was born in that upper chamber, where the Holy Ghost came in the double likeness of the wind and the fire.

There was no such existence till then.

Simon the son of Jonas was born years before—the Apostle Peter was born then.

And the new man then created—the new man then born—has been one and the same ever since.

We have seen him.

We have seen him on a lofty stage—as the holy apostle, as the sainted bishop, as the patient confessor, as the faithful martyr—witnessing unto death.

But we have seen the same man, the same character, the same being, in very humble

positions and circumstances. What were the characteristics?

I need not enumerate. The mind was that which was first in Christ Jesus.

The striking thing is the unity. It is this which impresses.

‘They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.’

The world takes little or no account of theological agreement. It is not the faith, so much, which impresses it—it is the character, it is the life.

Ecclesiastics often imagine that what impresses the world is the agreement in the use of saints’ days and prayer-books, in the government of the Church by bishops, in the common use of the Athanasian Creed. It is not this. It is the unity of character which impresses.

This new man—this person who lives for eternity—this person who evidently regards this world as the vestibule of another world—this person who is so fond of God, so devoted to Jesus Christ, so kind and so good to every one, so forgetful of self, so disinterested, yes (the world says, and almost worships as it says it) so unworldly—this new man—the world knows that it did not make him—there must be a world above this world to account for him. This is the second influence, due altogether to

the first, by which the world, out of Christ at present, shall be brought to believe.

3. Christ—and the Christian—are two influences. What is the third?

Evidently Jesus Christ Himself meant that it should be His Church—in the beautiful definition of the Church, given us in our own Church of England—‘that is, the blessed company of all faithful people’—‘that is, the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the whole world.’

We ought then to have been able to complete our first two influences by a third; making the series this—Christ—the Christian—Christendom.

You know that we cannot quite do this—not, at least, without large and damaging qualifications.

It is not so much the divisions of Christendom which prevent it—the great Eastern and Western schism—Romanism and Protestantism—the forty religions (as scoffers say) in England itself.

No, we could acquiesce (for the moment) in non-conformity: we know the futility of acts of uniformity: we know the hollowness of uniformity itself—capable of ten thousand dissensions, worse than any dissents, inside its own ‘leathern coat:’ it is not this which

prevents our naming Christendom as the third influence.

No, it is the terrible spectacle, not of a divided, but of a corrupted Christendom; a Christendom rent and torn, not by having chapels as well as churches, extempore prayers and evening Communions—but by having in itself, as the rule rather than the exception, such things as St Paul shuddered at and excommunicated, in a single instance, in Corinth—vices naturalized in a community claiming to breathe the air of heaven—nay, to be the very bride of Christ coming down out of heaven from God.

Therefore we are constrained to name as the third influence for the ultimate conversion of the world, not Christendom, but Christianity. Christ—the Christian—and Christianity—that Christianity which is the Gospel.

Christianity as St Paul, as St Peter, as St John and St James and St Jude, preached it; the Christianity of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; the Christianity of a free forgiveness, the Christianity of a new birth and a new life, the Christianity of a charity which thinketh no evil, which seeketh not her own, which spends and is spent willingly for the bodies and souls of men.

Such a Christianity is a power. The world which passes by on the other side questions of

words and names and technical theologies—passes them by, or else dogmatizes upon them with a lordly superiority or a contemptuous indifference—does feel, willingly or unwillingly, the influence of a religion of love and good works. The world itself recognizes its beauty: the world itself, once in the year, would take it for its own. We do not wish this. We cannot quite share and share alike with the world that which we claim as one of the credentials of our Christianity—that it first caught from a Saviour's new Gospel the word *ἀγάπη*—gave it a stamp of currency which classical Greek had denied it; gave it a motive and a meaning which classical Greek had not in its vocabulary; above all, gave it a practical character—created for it the three professions, of Christian chaplain, Christian physician, and Christian nurse—and then those appliances and those institutions of Christian ministration for which once again, for the 19th year, we plead with our Christian congregations today.

‘To write the same things unto you’ over and over again, St Paul said to the Philippians, ‘to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.’

‘To me not grievous’—and yet he evidently felt the temptation to regard it so, and to turn from it in impatience.

It is irksome, to flesh and blood, to repeat year after year the annual arguments for the annual gatherings—perhaps we are too impatient of it. ‘For you it is safe’—it would not be good for you, to be, like the Priest and the Levite in the Parable, always passing by distress and suffering, in the shortsighted carelessness of youth or the casehardened indifference of affluence. It would not be safe for you—in the view of two worlds and of the whole of your being.

This year has given us a painful but a salutary warning as to the exposure of all ranks and all conditions to the attack of sudden and fatal sickness. It should seem (but it may be only that we hear more of it in that shape) to have rather singled out the higher class for its fiercest onslaught. It is well. For it levels high and low, makes the common humanity real, and bids all alike feel the littleness and the shortness and the nothingness of the life that is.

These hospitals of London have been the refuge, this year, of high and low. Testimonies have reached us, from men of culture and place, to the shelter they have found, from sudden and terrible accident—and not shelter only, but tenderness, and charity, and piety too—within the walls of these hospitals which we sometimes regard as the receptacles only of the

poor. I am witness, in one instance, to the truth of this praise.

These papers which have been circulated through the church today have told you what sort and kind of offering we ask of you. We ask an offering from each one, according to his ability and according to his conscience. We ask a thankoffering for health mercifully preserved, or for health mercifully given back, in this long winter, this backward and ungenial spring. We ask more. We ask a thankoffering to Jesus Christ for His unspeakable gift—for having borne our griefs and carried our sicknesses; for having made it life to live, and no longer death to die; no less, for having created for us in Himself a new ideal of character and a new idea of humanity—an ideal perfect and beautiful, exemplary and evidential—an idea bringing down heaven to earth, and lifting man to God.

TEMPLE CHURCH,

June 7, 1891.

XVI¹.

NEVERTHELESS.

Luke v. 5.

Nevertheless.

THRONGED and pressed by a multitude eager to listen, our Lord has marked an empty boat drawn up on the beach, and has taken it for His pulpit. That wonderful voice, 'as the sound of many waters,' easily made itself audible in the open air, across a margin of sea, to the multitudes crowding the shore. When He ceased to speak, He proposed to the owner of the boat, who was to be the Apostle Peter, to launch out into the deep and let down the nets for a draught. The text occurs in St Peter's answer. He says, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net.'

If you look into his words you will find in them two predominant feelings. One is that of

¹ Preached at the Afternoon Service after an Ordination.

weariness : 'We have toiled all the night ;' must we begin again ? The other is that of discouragement : 'We have taken nothing ;' must we, after failing all these hours most favourable for fishing, now start again in the full glare of a noonday sun ?

'Nevertheless.' Here is the correction of the two feelings. Nevertheless, if Thou biddest me, there is that in Thy voice which constrains my obedience, and notwithstanding weariness, and notwithstanding discouragement, nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net.

No illustration could be more admirable of the word taken for the text. St Peter's reply teaches us that the word 'nevertheless,' like its more sonorous synonym 'notwithstanding,' has in it two things, a 'though' and a 'yet.' This or that is against it, yet it shall be done. In the particular instance weariness was against it, and discouragement was against it, but there was a counterbalancing something for it ; that something was Christ's word, and that settled the question of doing or not doing.

It may be said with truth, and that is our subject, that life as a whole is one great 'nevertheless,' and that each act of the life is a little 'nevertheless.' And we may say further that a noble life is characterized by the preponderance of the 'yet' in it, and that a poor life is cha-

racterized by the preponderance in it of the 'though.' The poor life says, I have toiled all this while and nothing has come of it, now I give in. The noble life says, True, I have toiled all these hours, all these days, and I seem to myself to have been a mere and an utter failure; but Jesus Christ says, 'Let down the net,' and at His word, and simply because of His word, I will do it.

The remark is so simple, and so true to experience, that I might almost end here and leave it. But it is also so instructive, and so important, and so universally applicable, that I shall expand it a little, in the hope of making this word 'Nevertheless' the maxim and motto of the lives, young and old, here gathered to worship.

1. What is life itself, life as a whole, for any one of us, but a huge 'nevertheless?' a 'though' and a 'yet' in perpetual conflict, the 'though' being the plausible thing, and the tempting thing, and the half truth; the 'yet' less apparent, less evident, but the manly thing, and the courageous, and the right?

(1) Take the outward life.

Whose outward life has no 'though' in it? nothing, that is, to discourage it, nothing to tempt it to say, All these things are against me; let me resign myself, let me despair?

This is more obviously true of some lives than of others.

A few, few by comparison, are born to affluence, born to opportunity, born to advantage in the race of life. If there is anything in them, it has every chance given it of coming out. All will take knowledge of it, every one will admire, applaud, help it on. We cannot say that all things are equal, for this life, between man and man. It is an unequal struggle, it is an unfair race.

Yet look a little deeper, and see if there is not a 'though' even in the privileged life. Is there nothing adverse to success even in facility? Is there indeed anything so adverse to great success as facility? In reference to speakers, for example, we speak of a 'fatal fluency,' an abundance of words which actually interferes with and precludes real eloquence. It is so in other things. May not the highborn, the indulged, the flattered youth say, These things are against me; all this wealth, all this freedom, all this expectation? O for one whiff of the keen air of difficulty, of necessity, of poverty, of hardness! How doubly difficult for me the 'yet' of effort, of resolution, of struggle, of enterprise!

Yes, there are inequalities, none can gainsay it, in human life, viewed in its outward aspect, as a field of work and of competition. But we

may exaggerate them, and even charge God foolishly. Where the fire of genius burns, or the fire of a great enthusiasm, or the fire of a grand aspiration, it will be rather fanned than put out by a surrounding of straitness, of want, of discomfort, by the absence of everything but the self-help. 'Nevertheless' will be its sufficient motto. Weariness, yes; discouragement, yes; improbability, yes—'nevertheless!'

(2) Take the inward life.

All but fools have an inward life. They are conscious of something deeper and truer than the life of appetite, or the life of labour, or even the life of home. They know that there is that in us which thinks and feels, and is indeed most on the alert when we are in repose from those three kinds of living. They know that there is that in us which calls us to account for our own actions; and that, not in reference to their estimate by other men, but to an invisible tribunal and judgment to come. They know that there is that in us which is not at all proportioned to the vigour or the decay of the bodily strength; that which is as busy on a sick bed, or in the weakness of old age and approaching death, as in the meridian of all the powers, and which gives no sign of dying with the body, or ceasing to be when we are no more seen.

Such experiences, which might be greatly multiplied, are enough to give us all a practical proof of the existence in us of a life other than and almost independent of the outward.

It is of this inner life that we now speak, and we say of it that it too has its 'nevertheless,' its 'though' and its 'yet,' its conflicting arguments and its alternative decision.

It is to this inward life that religion, that the Gospel, that Jesus Christ makes appeal. And that appeal, so far from carrying compulsion with it into the will or into the conduct, does not even constrain the conviction of the understanding. Many a 'though' mingles itself with the 'yet;' many a plausible, many a reasonable suggestion of doubt hinders the great verdict of consent and the great resolution of devotion. The very conception of a spiritual life is difficult. The very idea of a free forgiveness of the unalterable thing done, of the irreparable thing left undone, is a new thought to nature. How much more the revelation of forgiveness by atonement, of the bearing of the sin of the world by a sinless, a divine Saviour? The observation of the effects of such a Gospel upon the world outside and upon the Church inside; its slow spread, its frequent repulse; the ebb of the once advancing tide; the conquest, sad and shameful, in some countries, of

the Cross by the Crescent ; the dark places of the earth still dark, and full still, after eighteen centuries, of the habitations of cruelty ; do not tell me that there is no ' though ' in all this to set against the ' yet ' of our hope and faith as Christians. The same law holds everywhere, and makes our watchword not so much the ' yea ' of obvious certainty as the ' nevertheless ' of a balance and a preponderance.

How much more when we add to the kind of difficulties already mentioned the experience of the imperfect operation of the Gospel upon hearts and lives which accept it ; first and foremost upon our own. ' If it be so, why am I thus ? ' is a question not to be silenced, difficult to answer. Infidel objections are rife, and sometimes not so much ingenious as obvious. It is possible to imagine—no one can say otherwise—a more overwhelming amount of demonstrative proof ; and the reason is not quite self-evident why God, designing to convince, should not write the conviction with the sunbeam.

Some few there may be who have even to say that they ' have toiled all the night and have taken nothing ; ' in other words, that they have struggled hard to believe, and have struggled hard to obey, and yet have neither succeeded in satisfying themselves of the truth, nor have had any sensible blessing vouchsafed to their

Christian endeavours. This is a sad case, explain it as we may.

But now our point is, that all these 'thoughts,' if they were multiplied tenfold, have a preponderating 'yet' to turn the scale. No multiplication of negatives can outweigh one positive. 'Be ready always,' St Peter says, 'to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you;' and let it be something of St Peter's own reason in the days of the infancy of his faith: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

Something we must have, or we shall be driven to the madhouse—something to live by, something to die upon. To tell us that we are to leave all in suspense; that we must be content, proud, to be Agnostics; think it a fine thing to see difficulties, and a generous thing to breed doubts; be satisfied to live sceptics, and die to go we know not whither; this may do for a certain class and order of human beings, but it will not, cannot, ought not to satisfy men who find it a very serious thing to live, and count it a very responsible thing to have these three talents, at least, to account for—a body, a mind, and a soul. Some questions cannot wait, one or two at all events—among them, Hath God spoken? and, What shall I do in the end thereof?

Therefore we say, Though the world of spirit is dim and mysterious; though, unlike the world of matter, it cannot prove itself to demonstration by compass or barometer, by telescope or microscope; though infidelity can say much for itself, and the volume of Christian evidence might conceivably be thicker, and the voice of God in Christ louder and more imperious; yet reason and conscience concur in assuring me that, if God speaks, He will speak in wisdom, speak in holiness, speak in love; and when I summon the whole of me—not one fragment, the cold scoffing intellect, naked and alone, but the whole of me as God made me, reason and conscience and heart and soul—to hearken whether and what God hath spoken, there does come a voice to me from the excellent glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, hear Him;’ and the mighty ‘nevertheless’ is the upshot and product of all my ponderings and balancings: Nevertheless, at Thy word, Son of God, Son of Man, I will let down the net of my two lives, the temporal and the eternal.

2. Life, we have said, is one great ‘nevertheless,’ and each act of the life, we go on to say, is one little ‘nevertheless.’

There is a ‘though’ as well as a ‘yet’ in the simplest action. It is pleasant to sit still, but I must be doing. It is irksome to perform

this duty, yet it must be done. The 'nevertheless' postpones the 'though' to the 'but,' and makes life the active useful energy which it is.

(1) Some of us, some of my younger hearers¹, are today resuming work. We should like a great 'Nevertheless' to be placarded over the door or desk of your schoolroom. And it will mean this to you. We seem to have been toiling a long time—the hours of a school day are many, the days of a school term are many—play is pleasant, work is dull—yet upon the habits of industry now formed will depend the usefulness and the happiness of a lifetime. So, though I see not the end, and see not the connection of the means with the end; see not how learning this particular lesson will do any good, or how the having learnt all lessons will have taught me anything practical; nevertheless, at the word of those who are older and wiser than I, and who seek only my good—at the word of One whose ministers they are, whose scholar I am—I will, again and yet again, let down the net.

(2) Today our thoughts have yet another special direction. An Ordination Day means a day which is the beginning of months and years

¹ The allusion was to two large Schools attending their first Services after the Summer Holidays.

to a number of lives whose education (in the youthful sense of that word) is ended, whose ministry (in the mature sense of that word) is beginning.

Has not this Ordination been to some of you, my young brothers, more than a little 'nevertheless?' Have you not had to say, There was this against it, and this—*yet?* Perhaps there was no small difficulty in obtaining the necessary education; want of means consigned me to some other occupation, though my heart was on fire for service, ministry, sacrifice; but God wonderfully cleared the way, blessed my own labours of years in another calling, or sent me unlooked-for aid from generous friends—and here I stand to-day, on the threshold of the happiest, noblest, most blessed of employments. I will thank Him and praise His glorious name.

Or perhaps the 'though' in your case was a different and a sadder one. You were conscious of a careless or sinful past. You misgave yourself as to your fitness. Had you the requisite faith? Had you the inward call? Had you the stability of character essential to consistency of conduct? Might you not wake up one day and find yourself a sceptic? Might you not bring shame on your profession by some old sin starting up, perhaps in a new shape, and working your ruin? Such questions made

you anxious, not without cause, while you looked only at yourself. But you were enabled to say, 'In the Lord put I my trust. Hath He not said, My grace is sufficient for thee? and may I not make answer and say, If so, when I am weak, then am I strong?'

Courage then, soldiers of the Cross newly enlisted, courage in humility, courage in self-despair! 'Nevertheless' shall be your word too, in the long warfare to which you are pledging yourselves. Lord, I am not worthy—nevertheless, at Thy word! I seem to have no tidings ready—howsoever, Lord, let me run! At Thy word my first sermon—at Thy word my daily toil—at Thy word my last breath.

The great 'nevertheless' is for you spoken; let the little 'nevertheless' be the very breath of your mouth day by day.

—The call comes to me at late evening from some newborn babe requiring baptism, from some distant deathbed needing to be lighted up from on high: I have been toiling all the day—it is a pleasant thing to look into the bright fire, to see the table spread for the evening meal, to have the interesting book open, and the prospect of a rare hour to enjoy it—*nevertheless!*

—The day is wet and gloomy, the school is far away, others are in charge, I am not ab-

solutely wanted, my sermon for Sunday is more important, one lesson cannot make much difference—*nevertheless!*

—I cannot prepare my sermon. I cannot fix upon a text. My head aches, my mind will not work, I must fall back on some old inmate of my cupboard; no one will recognize it; I can put a new text to it, a new beginning, a new ending—*nevertheless!* What! no subject—when souls are erring and straying all round me? No subject—when I profess sometimes to speak of ‘the manifold wisdom,’ ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ?’

—A heavy weight is upon my soul this morning. I cannot pray. God covers Himself with a cloud; my prayer will not pass through. Work is waiting, duty calls me out; it may unseal the fount of prayer to have visited that sick man, to have performed that office of charity, to have read prayers in the congregation, to have exchanged a few words with my fellow-workman; let the prayer wait—*nevertheless!* At Thy word I will fling myself before the mercy-seat with a more importunate entreaty; I will plunge myself whole in the open fountain; I will not minister till I have served; I will not go forth with the weapon which my own soul has not today proved—*nevertheless!*

Holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly call-

ing, let the Spirit of the Lord God be upon you, because He hath anointed you to preach His Gospel to the poor. Let that be your new plea with Him for a large outpouring. The work was Christ's before it was yours; nay, it is His still—yours only because His—yours only in Him. Stir up the grace that is in you. You are weak—then (like St. Paul) be 'weak in Him.' You are not worthy—*nevertheless!*

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,

September 20, 1891.

XVII.

ORDERLINESS OF GOSPEL SCRIPTURE.

Luke i. 3.

To write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus.

ST LUKE hoped, not only to write what was true, but to write it in order. He knew the importance of arrangement, not least in the things of God. 'God is not a God of confusion,' St Paul says—and the saying has many applications besides the one which he made of it.

It has an important application to God's revelations. The Bible, we are beginning to see, was many books before it was one. 'Biblia' was a plural word originally: it was quite a corruption—a late, and a significant one—to decline it as a singular. 'At sundry times,' as well as 'in divers manners,' 'God spake in the prophets'—and as God spoke they wrote. The whole volume, of the two Testaments, was some fifteen hundred years or more in writing; and it was written in order, not casually and not

promiscuously, as regards the divine Author. 'Moved by the Holy Ghost men spake from God;' and, as God is not a God of confusion, so they, speaking from Him, spoke in order. There was method, there was system, there was sequence and consequence, in the writing of the Bible.

Cavillers, and even thoughtful persons, have stumbled over the orderliness of Holy Scripture. In the Old Testament they have complained of what they ought to have recognized as the progressiveness of the moral teaching. Why was not the marriage law strictly defined to Abraham? Why was not the law of peace enjoined upon Joshua? Why was not the law of charity inspired into the Psalmists? Or, to turn in another direction, Why was not immortality distinctly revealed in Paradise, or atonement formulated at Sinai?

Such questions, which might be multiplied endlessly, arise out of a confused notion of the educational character of God's dealing—in other words, from the inability to enter into the idea of men who, writing by inspiration, 'wrote in order.'

One instance—a still more grave one—of the same inability to grasp the idea of order has place in some modern treatments of the Gospel itself.

It is generally admitted now that St Paul is

the earliest writer of any portion of the New Testament. Even St Paul's 2nd volume, comprising his four great Epistles—those addressed to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Romans—was probably written before any one of the four Gospels. The first three Gospels were almost certainly written before the fourth. Taking these as three epochs of Scripture writing, men have been struck with the differences in the three representations of Christ. They have so emphasized these differences as to declare that they amount to the presentment of three separate Christs.

Let us see, my brethren, whether—dropping altogether the controversial tone, which, odious everywhere, becomes almost irreverent in the house of God—we can trace something of that orderliness of writing which the text speaks of—something therefore evidential rather than staggering—in the acknowledged diversity amongst the three portions of our New Testament; (1) the writings of St Paul, (2) the first three Gospels, and (3) the writings of St John.

1. St Paul opens the written record. His one topic, like that of all who follow him, is Jesus Christ: how does he present Him?

We sometimes say that, if we had no one of the four Gospels in our possession, we could construct one for ourselves out of the Epistles.

the four Epistles if there were but the four just mentioned, of St Paul. This is true—but with one considerable modification.

‘Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?’ St Paul asks the Corinthians. But when he comes to explain himself in a later chapter of his letter, he dates the sight of Him in a manner quite unambiguous. ‘Last of all He appeared to me also’—and he is enumerating the witnesses of the Resurrection.

St Paul’s Gospel—the first written Gospel—is the Gospel of the Risen Lord. There is no mention, in St Paul’s writings, of the place or circumstances of the birth of Jesus Christ; no mention of the infancy, boyhood, or youth; none of the baptism, the temptation, or the transfiguration; no express mention either of the discourses or of the miracles: the Risen Lord is St Paul’s Gospel, as it was St Paul’s life.

But tarry a moment, and ask what the Risen Lord meant and symbolized for St Paul. The resurrection implied the death—was a word unintelligible and unmeaning without it. The death implied the life before death, though it might be silent alike as to its duration and as to its employment. The life before death implied the incarnation: no one is more peremptory than St Paul as to the pre-existence of Jesus

Christ in the form of God, and in equality with God: no one is more express in his assertion of the two Natures in the one Person: 'Son of David and Son of God' is read in the very title of the greatest of his Epistles: there is no silence and no hesitation and no ambiguity there. And the life before the death is characterized again and again by St Paul as a life of suffering: it was no sudden stroke of violence which cut short the life, it was but the culminating point of a life-long experience of the same piece and colour. Still St Paul's Gospel—and it was the first written Gospel—was the record, before all else and (rightly understood) alone, of the Risen Saviour, the Lord who had passed through death into life, to be the Resurrection and the Life of the world.

And say now, was not this the foundation truth—the truth which should be written down first if the whole truth was to be written in order? Other things might wait: particulars of the earthly life, sayings and doings full of instruction, pregnant with example—even deeds of superhuman power, which scarcely needed the telling when once the revelation of the risen Lord was unfolded—all these might wait: but the Person Himself, the Person of the Lord dead and living, the Person of Him in whom (for man's use) dwells all the fulness of the God-

head bodily, this could not wait: this was the necessity of those 'all men,' of that 'every man,' of whom St Paul was the Evangelist and the Apostle.

2. We must remember too, in passing now to the second epoch of the writing—the second stage in the composition of the second volume of the Bible—that the life of Christ upon earth was a memory before it was a record, the table-talk of the Christian society before it was compressed and stereotyped into any one written biography. One of the Evangelists tells us that, if all had been written which Jesus did, the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. The memory was richer than the record. It was also more graphic, doubtless, and more lifelike. Thus and thus He looked, He walked, He slept and He prayed: thus and thus He rebuked me when I was trifling, thus and thus He comforted me when I was in trouble, thus and thus He spake the unrecorded word, written in no Gospel, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

We can imagine St Paul less largely imbued with this oral, this conversational biography of Jesus Christ than those who were Apostles before him. The early days and years of his new faith were spent at a distance from the society to which that spoken biography was

familiar. It was three years, he says, after his conversion, before he even saw one of the Apostles—then only one or two, and those only for fifteen days. He was employed more in conversing with his new Master Himself, receiving direct from Him such particulars (he mentions one of them) as were of vital import to his ministry, than in hearing the reminiscences of those who had companied with Christ on earth and journeyed with Him to and fro between Galilee and Jerusalem.

But the time came when it was needful that memory should be safeguarded from passing into mere tradition, as it could only be by a transference of memories to the written page, more durable if less fascinating. The very fact of that transference might be a gain, even where memory was faithful. It would bear witness to the intended everlastingness of the religion. It would show that it contemplated all lands and all ages. It would bear witness to the importance of accuracy in every particular, and so to the transcendent importance of the great revelation as a whole. It would prevent the religion itself from degenerating into a mere pietism, supported upon a communion—degenerating at last into dreams and visions—with a world out of sight and with a Person imagined rather than known. Indeed without the record of the life of

Christ on earth—what He said, what He did, and what He was—there would be no security for the preservation of the Christian doctrine or even for the regulation of the Christian conduct.

Thus the second epoch of the orderly writing is readily justified by the children of wisdom. It is no new Christ that is introduced by it: it is the Risen Lord of St Paul's Gospel shown in the practical form of the Son of Man going about doing good, speaking gracious and holy words, and leaving an example that we men on earth should follow His steps.

If we would see the identity of the Christ of St Paul with the Christ of the three Gospels, we have but to turn from St Paul's heights and depths of spiritual mystery to those chapters of his Epistles in which he deals with practical duties, enforcing them everywhere by Christ's teaching and Christ's example, showing that his Risen Lord still touched, as He had once trodden, the earth of His sojourn, and was still the Master, as well as the Saviour, of the mankind bought with His blood.

On the other hand, if we would see the identity of the Christ of the three Gospels with the Christ of St Paul, we have but to open, almost at hazard, the biographies of the Son of Man, to find expressions and to find statements utterly inexplicable on any supposition but that of an

absolute Divinity. It is not in St Paul, it is in St Matthew, that we find that promise of a universal presence of Jesus Christ in the congregations of the Church that shall be; that prediction of a coming judgment in which the ministering angels are called the angels of Jesus Christ; that promise (once again) of an everlasting presence of Jesus Christ not in separate congregations but in the Church as a whole—to name but three specimens out of a large multitude—which take for granted, if they do not assert, the same Deity which belongs to the Christ of St Paul, and make it monstrous to forge contradiction out of variety, or a new personality out of a new point of view.

3. There remains yet one epoch of the orderly writing—it is that of the Apostle and Evangelist St John.

It was left for St John to prove the unity of the Christ of St Paul with the Christ of the three Gospels.

If there was, in appearance or on a hasty view, a little chasm between them, St John was to bridge it over.

St Paul presented a Christ in glory—and men might say, Who shall go up for us into heaven, to bring Him down to this meaner and grosser earth, that we may see and believe? The three Gospels presented a Christ living and

moving below—not indeed without mysterious tokens of a Deity quite conscious and at most only in abeyance—still, on the whole, very human, sometimes even seeming to be only human—and carried by the record (amplest by far in that part) to a death not human only but shameful, from which one single chapter brings Him back in a form so changed that it is difficult of recognition, and so presented as to furnish the hasty reader with but a faint and imperfect realization. Men might say, These Evangelists offer us (on the whole) a Christ merely human—who shall go down for us into the abyss to bring up a Christ available for two worlds?

St John answers both these questions. He presents to us the Christ of the three Gospels, already, upon earth, having all the lineaments of St Paul's Christ in glory. Each record of a miracle is the preface in St John's Gospel to the record of a discourse, in which every attribute of Deity is claimed indeed as of course, yet invested with a garb so human that the Godhead ceases to repel and only lends a subtle force to the Manhood. The remembrancing Spirit has brought back to that soul of inspired inspiring love words which at the time passed as the idle wind, but which a life of communion with the Christ of St Paul has brought back, word for word, to

the disciple who at the last supper lay in His bosom.

And when at last the death, nowhere so touchingly portrayed as in St John's narration, has had its sorrowful course, point by point, to its consummation in the awful but magnificent *Τετέλεσται* told only by St John; then begin those two chapters which record, in no faltering tones, but with the thrill of a grand Hallelujah, the reality of the triumph over the last enemy—showing us St Paul's Risen Lord alive with a new vitality from death and the grave—first rewarding love by revelation—then overcoming doubt by sight, while reproving doubt for wanting it—and granting finally that acted parable, of a struggling Church and an ever-present Lord, caring for the adversity and having pleasure in the prosperity of His servants—knowing the individual lot and fate of each one, and guarantecing to each that ever-present Presence in which life and death have changed their names.

And have we here a third Christ, known neither to St Paul nor to the three—visioned only and phantomed by a spurious St John, bred of the Essenes, fed upon Philo, invented in a second or third century, foisted upon the Church of East and West—is it so?

‘These are not the words of him that hath a

devil'—was the reply of some of the Jews to the infidels and scoffers of the Gospel day—may we not say of the fourth Gospel, These are not the words of a forger or a deceiver—show us their like elsewhere—show us the counterpart of the 6th chapter, of the 10th chapter, of the 11th chapter, of the 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th chapters of St John's Gospel, in any writer, primitive or medieval—above all, yes above all, of the 21st chapter of St John—and we will join ourselves to your company, though it be the company of sceptics and blasphemers. Meanwhile we shall say this—That Gospel to which believers turn for guidance in life and comfort in death—that Gospel to certain chapters of which even semi-sceptics bid their friends turn for support in sorrow—has upon it what we count brand-marks of truth: we do not wish for an elevation higher than this, even if it be to the very throne of science or criticism: we are content to cast in our lot with mediocrity, with inferiority, with contempt, may we but be able to hear in a dying hour 'In my Father's house are many mansions—I go to prepare a place for you'—or when we stand by the open grave, 'Our friend sleepeth—I come again to awake him out of sleep.'

Does God write in order, or does 'confusion' bewray the no-God, when He bids St Paul first

write down the Saviour in glory—then the three tell us what He was on earth—and then the beloved Apostle, survivor of the Eleven, spectator of a new age with its troublous fortunes, build the little bridge, little but very substantial, which shall knit together the two, and say—

‘He that ascended is the same also that descended: I am He that liveth, and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore?’

TEMPLE CHURCH,

November 15, 1891.

XVIII.

THE FAITH AND THE BIBLE.

2 Corinthians iii. 16.

Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

ST PAUL is using one of the striking incidents of the great Law-giving on Sinai as the text of a sermon on the greater glory of the Gospel. When Moses came down from the mountain, his countenance was still shining with the glory of the divine Presence. He was obliged to veil his face that the people might talk with him. When he returned to speak with God, he took off the veil.

St Paul uses that veil as a parable. He makes it a type, first of all, of the Law itself. The Law was not intended to be its own interpreter. Christ was the 'end' of the Law; but it was not intended that the Israelite of the Exodus should read Christ plainly in it. The Law was an educational system. It came to

stimulate enquiry; it came to awaken conscience; it came to create two wants, the want of forgiveness and the want of strength, without being able to satisfy either. Thus the Law was what St Paul elsewhere calls it, a 'schoolmaster unto Christ;' pointing to Him, making men want Him, predicting Him by significant ceremonies, by sacrifices and prophecies, but not revealing Him so that he who ran might read.

St Paul afterwards transfers the veil from the face of Moses to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It lies, he says, upon the 'reading.' The Israelite of his day still read, or heard read, a veiled Bible. Not till the Gospel lights up the Old Testament is the Old Testament itself legible in its real sense.

A further transfer of the veil is from the book to the reader. The veil lies upon the 'heart.' And, as Moses took off the veil when he returned into the divine Presence, so it is with the heart. 'When it turns to the Lord,' the text says, 'the veil is taken away'—or, more correctly, 'it takes off the veil.' The margin of the Revised Version gives an alternative construction: 'When a man turns to the Lord.' But the sense is the same.

The preacher in these days is often asked to enter into controversy. A number of questions are in the air—ought not the pulpit to discuss

them? Some of them are grave and deep questions. They affect the study of the Bible. They touch the authority of the Saviour. In the same degree they enter into the religious habits and the religious thoughts of men who have either.

The preacher is perplexed by the demand. It seems unkind to pass it by. It would give him topics of interest to himself as well as to his hearers. It would relieve the monotony, real or supposed, of common preaching. In some cases it might convey satisfaction to the unwilling doubter, or comfort to the distressed and shaken believer.

On the other hand, he may have a reasonable mistrust of his own knowledge or ability to deal with such questions. He may have a reasonable fear lest he should do more harm than good by entering into them. He may suggest doubts to many which are felt only by a few. In the case of these few, he may fail to touch the point of their difficulty. He may aggravate rather than pacify their discomfort by unsatisfactory solutions. Besides all these reasons for hesitation, there is a preliminary to be thought of which is certainly important, and to which I would ask your attention for a few moments this morning.

St Paul speaks of 'the heart turning to the

Lord' as the condition of the removal of the veil, wherever the veil lies. It may lie upon the book, or it may lie upon the reading, or it may lie upon the heart. Any way, the condition of its removal is the turning of the heart, or the turning of the man, in a certain direction, into a particular Presence. He calls it a returning, a turning back—as though to remind us that that Presence was ours once—is our birthplace and our home. And he seems to say that to attempt to remove the blinding (or, as he rather suggests, the binding) veil, as a thing either necessary or indeed possible without or before this return, is an inversion of the right and natural order, which must end in confusion and disappointment. Get back first into the Presence, he says, and then the veil upon the book, and the veil upon the reading, and the veil upon the heart, the triple veil, will either fall off of itself or yield to the first touch of the removing hand.

'Here is wisdom.' It is impossible not to see that the discussion of such questions as are now everywhere, encroaching even upon the columns of our newspapers with their semi-sacred headings, is ventured upon by many persons who have no claim to the title of religious, serious, or even thoughtful. It is regarded by many as in itself, and without any foregoing

enquiry as to their fitness to undertake it, a religious action. Worse than this, it serves as an excuse to many persons for deferring religion altogether as a practical duty. It is no uncommon inference from such ambiguities as are supposed to rest upon the authorship of books of the Bible, or the compatibility of scientific discoveries with the first chapter of Genesis, that all is uncertain, and all must wait till these matters are cleared up, as regards the faith of Christ, the worth-while of praying, or the life of a world to come.

This is a very serious matter. And one duty of the preacher, who is chary of the introduction of argument or controversy on questions of the moment into the pulpit, is to make the order of things clear and plain—to show what comes first and what afterwards in religious matters—even at the risk of being thought to make light (which he certainly ought not to do) of the kind of subjects which he puts second.

We shall make bold to speak very plainly on this point, of the preliminary and the subsequent, the primary and the secondary, in religious matters.

‘When the man turns to God, he takes off the veil’—then, and not till then. Till then the veil is on the Bible, the veil is on the reading of the Bible, the veil is on the heart. When he

turns (or rather returns) to God, he turns, as St Paul goes on to say, to One who is Spirit, One who is freedom, freedom alike from the bondage of form and letter, of phrase and gloss, of interposed medium and stereotyped dogma.

Some man will say, But these questions which you are thus postponing do touch the essence of religion. If the Bible goes against science, how can I believe the God of the Bible? If Jesus Christ appealed to certain writings as writings of David or Moses, and modern criticism shakes my faith in that authorship, how can I rely upon His doctrine in matters more vital?

Here we interpose an enquiry which must be frank and outspoken.

Suppose the very worst—‘I speak as a man’—*suppose that there were no Bible*—would it follow as a matter of course that there was (I will not say no God, but even) no faith?

Which was first in the world—the Gospel, or the Gospel Scriptures? Would it have annihilated Incarnation, Atonement, Calvary, Resurrection, or the coming of the Holy Ghost, to have had no written record of it, or no authoritative, no inspired record of it? *Can the thing done be undone by another thing not having been done?*

The Society founded by Jesus Christ would

equally have been in existence—the Church, which is the company of believing people dispersed throughout the world, would have had its oral tradition, preserved perhaps in creeds and catechisms, in liturgies and homilies—if it had not had, over and above this, any sacred books, of Gospels or Epistles or Apocalypse, to keep it pure and to keep it steady. Men would equally have been bound to give heed when the Evangelist stood in their streets, though they might have had many questions to ask, and many doubts to get settled, which the mercy of God has answered for us by His superadded gift of Books and (at last) a Book.

There might have been a Revelation and no written record of it. There might have been an Incarnation and a Redemption, a divine Saviour and an inspiring Spirit, a Church and an innumerable multitude of Christians, a creed and a worship, a Baptism and a Communion—and no New Testament and no Bible at all. Do not turn aside from the statement, hypothetical as it is, because the sound shocks you. It is vital to the argument. If it is true, it follows that a man might have turned to God on the faith of Jesus Christ—might have been bound in reason and conscience to do so—without waiting for any writing; that a man may turn to God on the faith of Jesus Christ—may

be bound in reason and conscience to do so—without waiting to make sure of any particulars affecting a writing, or a collection of writings, bearing the title of sacred Books.

I might go further and ask whether as a matter of fact the Christian faith of any one of us came to him direct and straight from the Bible. However early informed and instructed out of the Bible, was not the word of the mouth, the oral teaching, prior to and beforehand with the scriptural, in stamping upon us the seal of the faith?

I know there have been wonderful works wrought by the Bible, by the Bible lighted or stumbled upon, in the way of communicating the first knowledge and the first conviction and the first feeling after God. But these are memorable cases because they are exceptional. The ordinary experience of a Christian congregation is the other—‘Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word’ which was a voice before it was a book.

How preposterous then, how monstrous, would it be to suffer any attacks, however formidable, however fundamental, upon the Bible to detach us from the faith once for all delivered. The two fields of battle are separate, if contiguous. The one question is that of faith in the Son of God. Is there, or is there not, a

continuous, a consistent, a historical memory of One who came to this earth from the heaven of God, took our nature upon Him, died for us and rose again, formed a Society of believers, sent down upon it the Holy Spirit, made it a holy Church, lives in it, is with it all the days till the consummation? Have I proof of it—in holy lives and peaceful deaths, in mighty works done in His name, in a wonderful supernatural influence breathing everywhere into hearts, making homes bright and nations powerful, distinguishing between its homes and the homes of superstition or atheism, bidding conscience itself, nature itself, see that it is manly, that it is human, to be a Christian?

The other question is a separate, though a cognate and contiguous one. How to regard the Bible? What is inspiration? Is it a mechanical thing, such that the writer who took pen in hand to narrate the fortunes of Israel, or the numbers of its slain in battle, or the ages of its patriarchs, was instantly flooded by a light from on high, guarding him against the error of a cipher or the over-pressure of a tradition? Is it of such a nature as to anticipate the discoveries of science by a particularity unintelligible or untrue to the mind of the writer and first readers, or to stereotype the discoveries of science at one point, so as to guarantee the

science of the nineteenth century against the disturbing or contradicting conclusions of the twentieth? Or is it, on the contrary, as human as divine—expressed by its own phrase, '*Men spake, from God*'—spake as men, spake as speaking to men—using therefore not more the nouns and the particles of one human language than the modes of speech and the circumstances of culture and the points of advance of the generation in which they wrote and to which they addressed themselves? How else could they write so as to be understood? How else could they write so as to show the very purpose and intent of the writing—not to supersede human faculties, not to precipitate the knowledge of the nineteenth century after Christ upon the nineteenth century before Him, not to write up to the nineteenth age as though that age had the last word and had made the latest possible discovery in the illimitable universe—but to bring God into human life, to show man as man and God as God, to make good the inspired word which says, 'Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils'—'Be still then, and know that I am God'?

Can there be confusion worse confounded than that which would remove the landmark between these two battle-fields—the battle-field of the Christian faith, and the battle-field of

the nature and limits of the inspiration of the Bible?

The controversy passes from the monstrous almost to the ludicrous, when men are seriously disturbed, or angrily girding themselves to the encounter, over such questions as the priority of birds and reptiles in the cosmogony of Genesis. Let us hope that minds that have reason, souls at least that have reverence in them, may feel how utterly beside the mark of spiritual profiting are such matters as these. 'When the heart returns to its God, then, then first, it takes off its veil.' And the first veil that goes is the veil of a silly trifling; and the second veil that goes is the veil of an ignorant confusion; and the third veil that goes is that inability to appreciate proportions which makes the difference in national councils between the politician and the statesman—which makes the difference in theology between what St Paul calls the 'children in understanding' and those who 'in understanding are men.'

When the Epistle to the Hebrews selects its illustration of the action of faith upon the sacred history of Creation, it makes it this, this one, and this only: 'By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the thing seen has not come into being out of things that appear.' He brushes aside such

particulars as days before a sun, firmament between waters and waters, priority of animal existences, and all the other details and settings of the great picture of a chaos passing into a Cosmos : he fastens upon the great revelation—a revelation *indeed*, which One only could originate ; a creation by the *fiat* of a pre-existing, a self-existent will ; a creation which was no rearrangement of an independently existent material, but, in the strictest sense, a making of the seen out of the unseen, of the material out of the immaterial, of the first atom out of nothing, whatever its capacities (only the more wonderful if they were infinite) of extension and expansion, of reproduction, of developement—if you like the name better, of evolution.

‘In the beginning God created’—there is revelation. ‘Let us make man in our image’—there too is revelation. These two things we could not have known. The divine image the original, where the blurred and damaged thing is the actual ; no imperfect creation, but a fall afterwards, from which therefore there may be a rising—these are primary truths indeed, worthy of inspiration, because indiscoverable without it. Other particulars shall come and go : let astronomy first, let geology afterwards, have their free course and be glorified : the divine Artificer made the mind and the implements for both.

He shall count it no disparagement to His Bible, if, speaking to men and speaking by men, it limited itself, in things indifferent—things not spiritual nor vital to souls—within the bounds of human speech as then spoken, of human conception as then conceived.

‘When the man turns to God,’ then, and not till then, ‘he takes off the veil.’ It were unbecoming, it were irreverent, to keep it on. Alas for the tenacity of these veils! Stupidity is obstinate, prejudice is obstinate, fanaticism is obstinate. But of all tenacities, of all obstinacies, none perhaps is so inveterate as the neglect of definition. Men will fight to the death over a metaphor—be it redemption, be it regeneration, be it inspiration. A buying back, a being begotten again, a breath breathed in—yes, *and then?* A breath of God—who shall deny this to the Bible? Who can open that book and not feel something—he is wisest, perhaps, who least tries to articulate it—a fragrance, an aroma, a perfume; an elevation above earthly estimates and judgments; an elevation to a higher level than that of the study, the lecture-room, the periodical; a hand opening a door in heaven, and a voice saying, ‘Come up hither?’

May we not be contented to leave that as the experience, that almost as the definition, at

least until we have settled the question of questions, Has the heart, has the man, turned? When he has, he will have other things to tell of the Book as well as of the Presence. He will readily believe that there *may* be an exactitude, not yet ascertained or ascertainable except by fanaticism, in Bible science. It may be so. A later century may humble itself before the very terms of the record, and confess that God is in them of a truth. At present all we can say is, The revelation of science is no business of the Bible: if it does speak the philosopher's language, it is incidentally and beside its mark. Its secret is different: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath heart of man compassed, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit'—*and the Bible is their record.*

TEMPLE CHURCH,

February 7, 1892.

XIX.

THE PERSON REALLY ON HIS TRIAL.

2 Corinthians xiii. 5.

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith:
prove your own selves.*

THE stress lies where I have laid it—on the word, twice repeated, and standing first (in the Greek) in each clause—‘yourselves.’

These Corinthians were for examining St Paul. They challenged his Apostleship, they denied his apostolical commission, they defied his apostolical power. He was not one of the Twelve—that was admitted. He was not, like Matthias, appointed to fill a vacancy among the Twelve, after a direct appeal to the Searcher of hearts to dispose the solemn lot.

They had many other things to say about him, in that impertinent spirit which seems to be always thought so suitable to sacred things and sacred persons. He could write a good letter, they said: he could use strong words at a

distance: but his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible. Nothing was too trivial to be turned against him. He had meant to come twice to Corinth—once on his way into Macedonia, and once on his way back again. He had decided to come only once—on his way back. Instantly he is declared to be afraid to come. He is not a man of his word. He says and he unsays. He talks of coming with a rod—he has no rod to wield. Elymas the sorcerer is an old story—Hymenæus and Alexander are in the dim future: let him do his worst.

St Paul has been very patient with all this impertinence: it has not defeated his Christian charity; it has not quenched his pastoral love. But for their own sakes he must not leave it quite unproved. You seek a proof of Christ speaking in me: you shall have it. If I come again, I will not spare. Weak in myself, and in that mortality which stooped once in Christ to the cross—in Him, and in His risen life, I am strong—yes, strong (if it must be so) toward you. I shall pass the examination: I shall stand the test. The real anxiety lies elsewhere. ‘Examine *yourselves*, whether ye be in the faith—prove *yourselves*.’ Are you quite sure that Jesus Christ is in you? When that question is settled, it will be time enough to discuss me.

There are those, I believe in our day, who are still (like these Corinthians) discussing St Paul. He is naturally a stumbling-block to the sceptic. Whatever may be suggested about other persons who have a place in the Bible, St Paul unquestionably is a historical person. St Paul is certainly an author. He has left writings behind him—genuine writings, imperishable writings if any writings are so. And in those writings there is not only a marked personality, there are also materials for a very complete biography. These writings are not filled with mystic dreams or cloudy theories: this man touched the solid earth, travelled widely, worked hard, knew his own mind, and impressed it with wonderful success upon other minds. This man stops the way when you would ride roughshod over Christianity—you must account for him somehow.

And the easiest way of accounting for him is to say first, with Festus, that he was beside himself—an enthusiast, a fanatic, at all events; and then to say secondly that he was an out-lying, eccentric, eclectic theologian, preaching a self-constructed Gospel, disowned and disclaimed by the Church of his time, as little representative of the Christianity of the real Jesus Christ as any Anabaptist or any Quaker of the later centuries after him.

The point of attack is changed from that of his Corinthian detractors. We do not now challenge his apostolical powers or dispute (in so many words) his apostolical commission. But he is more really troublesome, more really in the way, than he ever was, and the two suggestions which have been mentioned are the readiest expedients for displacing him.

There is no possible answer to either of them but the study of his writings. Of the beauty of his words we say nothing; because enthusiasm may be eloquence, enthusiasm may be poetry, enthusiasm may be genius, and of a high order. What we dwell upon with more confidence is the remarkable 'healthiness' (to use a word of his own), the admirable good sense, the practical wisdom, of some of his more level and prosaic passages—such, for example, as his directions about married life, about the duty of bearing and forbearing (without separating) even between Christian and heathen partners; about the relations of slaves and masters; about dealing with money matters connected with charities; about the religious work of women; about the use and abuse of the world; about exaggerations of the temperance question; about asceticism in general, its misreading of the Gospel, its absolute inability to cope with the 'flesh' in its radical mischief and subtle

working. These are not the counsels of a fool or a fanatic. 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth words of truth and soberness.'

St Paul is not obsolete, as a man, or as a teacher.

But there is a subject of discussion wider and deeper than any personality—except it be that one personality which is not human only.

These Corinthians were directed into a different examination-room from that which set papers in the apostolicity of St Paul. Brethren, there is a Senate-house now filled with candidates for examination in a larger subject—what is called in this verse 'the faith'—meaning by that expression not the grace or the quality or the principle so named, but the revelation itself of Him in whom we are called to believe.

And to this examination men run or men saunter, as if there were no doubt whatever, no previous question at all, as to their admission or their qualification.

I had thought whether perhaps St Paul's correction of these Corinthians as to the subject of examination might have in it a word in season for us Englishmen, nearing the end of a century, and largely responsible to God and our country for the tone of the next.

This perpetual discussion of the credentials of Christianity, this holding of the faith in suspense, this openness of ear and mouth to each latest cavil of the scoffer, this refusal to move the closure and end debate—is it, as some think, a condition of candour, a tribute to truth, a recognition of reason as the very conscience of the understanding which it is the unpardonable sin to set aside? Shall the time never come when we shall say of Jesus Christ as all good men say of their life-long friend, I listen to no rumours and no innuendos about him—I have ‘shelved’ him never to be moved—‘I know whom I have believed?’ There are questions not new every morning; not to be reopened each day without shaking the stability, the moral respectability, of the life. Is the faith never to be one of these? Shall the time never come when, to use St Paul’s language, we may be either weak or strong but both alike ‘in Christ’—may even doubt *in* Christ without doubting *about* Him—may enter with intelligent interest into all manner of enquiries about readings and renderings of the Bible, about authorships of books and authenticities of chapters, about discoveries of modern science and conclusions of modern criticism—and do all without one misgiving as to the Deity of Jesus Christ or the salvation bought with His blood?

‘None of the disciples’—it is written of one memorable meeting—‘durst question Him, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord.’

O for something of that controlling awe in the controversies of this generation! The cowardice of the Christian has taught impertinence to the sceptic—the cowardice which suffers itself to ask again and again, at each apparent change of His posture or His vesture, ‘Who art Thou?’ instead of quietly knowing that it is the Lord; the cowardice of a perpetual misgiving, of a universal peradventure, of a panic flight when no man pursueth. ‘If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?’ What can they do? Answer, ‘The Lord is in His holy temple: the Lord’s throne is in heaven.’ Let them find quietness and confidence there.

Fear not for the faith: like truth, its other name, the faith is mighty and shall prevail. Never was the faith so powerful as in this 92nd year of this 19th century of the Gospel. If only Christians themselves would distinguish things that differ, would not turn parade-grounds into battle-fields and imagine enemies which are not, they would oftener thank God and take courage. Only let them ‘know that it is the Lord,’ they will be less irritable in questioning and braver to make reply.

‘Examine *yourselves*’ is St Paul’s counsel. Examination of *him* can wait. Self-examination cannot.

At this season it is usual to dwell much on self-examination. From a thousand pulpits self-examination is recommended today. Rules are given, topics are suggested, for self-examination. Some of these will seem trivial, puerile, trifling, to sensible people. But no one can call St Paul’s subject of self-examination trifling. I can rather fancy its seeming to some premature, precarious, visionary.

‘Whether ye be in the faith.’ ‘Whether Jesus Christ is in you.’ St Paul then assumes the faith. St Paul assumes Jesus Christ. He bids them ask, Am I in it? Is He in me?

Refreshing, reassuring, reinvigorating, is that question. It is good for us. It replaces us where we ought to be—in front of the great white throne: below, not above, the faith: at its bar, not on its judgment-seat. Common men, very common men, presume to examine the faith—and it can give account of itself. But who are they that shall try it? Who are they, in the clubs of men and in the saloons of women that shall die, who presume to arraign before them, as they lounge and as they jest, the word which, if Jesus Christ be true, shall one day judge them?

‘Examine *yourselves*,’ St Paul says, ‘whether ye be in the faith.’

I might have made it one of the examples of St Paul’s sanity, that he lifts self-examination itself to so high a level. Only compare his with the topics of a modern churchman’s self-examination. I should risk the dignity of this pulpit if I named them. But I will name his.

He goes to the man within the man, and asks there, Art thou in the faith?

Art thou in the faith—inside that citadel, that castle—sweeter word, that home—which is God’s revelation, God’s secret told, God’s mystery, hidden for ages, now made known—art thou in it? Is it all round thee? Does it fill thy chamber, thy house, thy life, thy being? Hast thou taken it to thee in its beauty, in its power, and in its love? Hast thou proved it upon thyself, and found it true? The revelation of a Father, who has thee in His keeping, in His guarding, in His guiding, in His love? The revelation of a Saviour, who has borne thy sins and carried thy sorrows—has undertaken for thee, is preparing thy home, that then He may come for thee? The revelation of a Comforter, dwelling in thee, touching the spring of will, taking the things of Christ and showing to thee?

Art thou in this faith—inside it—so that it surrounds thee, clothes thee, cherishes thee,

warms and fills thee? Examine thyself. Answer thyself. Other questions and answers flit and buzz about thee—they touch not the real man. Didst thou eat of that pleasant meat, it being Lent? Didst thou keep thy fast before Communion? Didst thou, as the condition of a dispensation from thy Lenten penance, take care to add that penitential Psalm to thy last night's devotion? Yes—or else No—but it touched not the real thing in me. Hungry and thirsty, the soul still faints in me.

Not so when St Paul is in the confessional, and says, Art thou in the faith? Is Jesus Christ in thee?

How can the man know (some one asks) whether Jesus Christ is in him?

St Paul knew. St Paul evidently expected people to know. St Paul knew that it is possible to know it—that it is good to know it—that it is no fanaticism and no presumption to know it.

Brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, let it be the business of this Lent for us to know it. We are losing time, we are missing happiness, we are standing idle, by not knowing it. We are living on a lower level of the spiritual life by not knowing it. We are loiterers in earth's marketplace, instead of being labourers in Christ's vineyard, by reason of not knowing it. And yet how we shrink from the ascer-

taining ! How we dread the beatific vision now which we profess to look for hereafter ! How we frame for ourselves excuses, apologies, substitutes for it—any number of types and symbols—any number of services, sermons, and sacraments, which may excuse us from just seeing the King in His beauty—though in Him (all the time) we live and move and have our being.

‘Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door,’ then speak to Him. ‘Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.’

Examine yourselves—prove yourselves—try yourselves. The balance for weighing, the surgeon’s probe, the crucible for the metal, each shall furnish a figure for this true Lent process. Yes, it is a thorough and a decisive act. It needs one thing for its doing—it needs the Presence—it needs the meeting, face to face, of two entities, God, and the soul.

And flesh and blood shrinks from that meeting. It echoes the old superstition, ‘We shall surely die because we have seen God.’

Nay, not so: we shall surely live because we have seen Him—live for the first time, and live for ever.

Let ours be a spiritual Lent. Let us not skim the surface of the spiritual life, but dive into its deeps. Let us plunge whole into the

open fountain : not satisfied with hands or feet—that can be done afterwards—first bathe the whole body in the fountain opened for all sin, for all uncleanness. First be in the faith—first have Jesus Christ in you—and then all things are clean to you. Business—interests of clients, or interests of the commonwealth—home, with its sweet intervals of rest from labour—church, with its beautiful sounds of music and Gospel, its wholesome utterances of confession and praise, its delightful approaches, in acts of faith, to a revealed mercy-seat and an unveiled throne of grace—these shall further you, help you, speed you on your way towards a land very far off yet already yours in promise and foretaste. *

‘Crucified through weakness, He liveth by the power of God. We are weak in Him, but we shall share His life by the same power.’

TEMPLE CHURCH,
March 6, 1892.

XX.

THE PLACE OF MIND IN RELIGION.

I Peter i. 13.

Gird up the loins of your mind.

THE phrase may have lost something of its picturesqueness in its transfer from the East to the West, and from the first century of the Gospel to the 19th. But, if St Peter stood amongst us at this moment, here, in England, in London, at the exact point of thought and talk and writing which is our position today, I doubt if he could have found a word of counsel more suitable or more suggestive, than that which speaks in this brief text, 'Gird up the loins of your mind.'

It is a phrase by itself in Scripture. The girding of the loins in a literal sense, as for Elijah's run before Ahab from Carmel to Jezreel—or in a spiritual sense, as when our Lord bids His disciples to have their loins girded about as well as their lights burning—these are familiar

to readers of the Bible. The peculiarity of the text lies in the application of the figure to the mind or understanding, and in its evident connexion nevertheless with the province of religion. 'Gird up the loins of the mind, be sober, and hope to the end.'

Though the custom, the costume, alluded to, is Oriental, it has left a distinct mark upon Western language. When we would describe a disrespectable disreputable way of living, we call the person in question 'dissolute,' and the literal meaning of our name for him is an 'ungirt' man. Sometimes the word 'loose' serves the same purpose, and is the brief synonym of the other.

What can be more striking than St Peter's application of the same figure to minds, and to minds in their religious aspect? He sets before us the figure of an ungirt, untidy, slovenly mind, and bids us beware of it in ourselves as religious men and Christians.

Our attention has been called more than once lately—and we must live in the clouds or in the deep sea if we would escape it—to the subject of a general unsettlement of men's minds on the distinct yet cognate questions of faith and the Bible. St Peter lays his finger upon one of the commonest causes of this unsettlement when he sets before us in the text the

figure of a dissolute mind. He photographs to us the poor, untidy, slovenly, dishevelled intellect, called to deal, or volunteering to deal, with matters of supreme and eternal interest, and makes us feel, without his saying it, what must be the result, to itself, and to minds like itself looking to it for guidance. He teaches us that religion, in all its bearings, whether of enquiry, opinion, belief, or conduct, demands of us all a certain habit and condition of mind, which he compares to that equipment of the body which all acknowledge as necessary for any effort, any exertion, any activity whatever.

One thing is presupposed—St Peter counted it self-evident—that mind has place in the things of God.

St Peter counted it self-evident. Yet the orthodoxy, and the infidelity, of our day have both doubted it.

Orthodoxy has too often warned off reason from the things of God. It has made it sacrilege to touch the Bible. Even the received text of the Bible—notoriously casual in the details of its formation—has been protected from examination. Enquiry into the authorship of its Books has been declared treason to the Lord of the Gospel. 'It is Corban'—each line, each letter. Reason must wear fetters if it would enter the temple. Can we wonder if infidelity

has accepted the judgment of orthodoxy concerning itself, and pronounced faith irrational, faith itself being the judge?

Man has but one mind, parcel it out, and label its parts, as you may. Mind must move altogether, if it is to move at all. It is idle to say, You may interpret the Bible—even this with a prejudgment—but the Book must be bound, and the parts of the Book must be headed, ere you touch it. The man answers, I am sorry, but I am so made that I cannot obey you. I have not two minds, one of which I can leave behind me at your bidding—I must come whole, or I cannot come.

And St Peter is of his opinion. St Peter does not fear the too much mind, but the too little. What St Peter dreads is the half-mind. What he rebukes is the slovenly, the untidy, the dissolute mind. He does not fear the practised, the disciplined, the intense intellect. He bids the mind gird itself up, as for a task requiring all its exertion, a task desperate without it.

Mind has place in the things of God, and must gird itself up to handle them.

Just in proportion as it is earnest and active, it will know and keep its place.

The ungirt, slovenly, slatternly mind, whether in one province of thought or another, confuses and confounds everything. It mixes its tools,

and it jumbles its processes. It prunes with a spade, and digs with a pruning-hook. It takes its telescope to a leaf, and its microscope to a planet. It will see a wind, and hear a face. It will smell a view, and taste a flower.

Just so in religious matters. It says, If there is such a thing as spirit, let me see it. If miracle is possible, work me one now. If there is a world to come, let me inspect it. If there is a God, show me Him. And so in everything. The ungirt mind has no conception of the great principle, *in pari materiâ*. It demands tangible evidences of intangible essences. Thus it precludes proof, and begs the question it has to decide.

The ungirt mind will rush in where angels fear to tread. It will hazard a hasty word here, and a contemptuous word there: it will declare this impossible and that ridiculous before it has given time for the bare statement of either: it will confuse the words fact and theory, discovery and conjecture: it will quote a name or two, and misquote the saying of either: yes, the ungirt mind *is* dangerous; it is ready for any heresy or any schism: but the girt-up mind, girt up by good education, long experience, and severe scrutiny, is what is wanted when things of God are in question; for it will know when and where it does not and cannot know: it will

know when it is out of its depth : it will know when it has passed out of the region of discovery, and into the region where, if it is to know anything, it must be because God Himself shall tell.

Yes, this is the beauty of a girt-up as opposed to an ungirt or dissolute mind—that it is quite aware, without your setting it bounds, that there is a point where neither science nor criticism can tell anything ; that there is a point beyond which neither diagnosis nor intuition can go—I might instance the essence of life, I might instance the nature of death—and after which reason itself, intellect itself, can say nothing unless reason itself, intellect itself, has already convinced you of an infallible Guide, after whom you may walk safely because He, that infallible Guide, unquestionably knows the way.

This is the true difference between the dissolute and the well-girt mind. The one will undertake the command of the Mediterranean fleet or the charge of the Greenwich observatory, never having learned either navigation or astronomy. The other is modest, just because it knows—knows the knowable, and knows where knowledge itself can but bow the knee and worship.

Mind has place in the things of God. For this among other reasons—that it knows the bounds of its knowing. Those bounds are not

presented to it beforehand—they are discovered by it as it toils on. And indeed they are discovered by it before it actually reaches them in disappointment. In the very nature of things it has realized them. How can I tell whence I came and whither I go? How can I tell so much as where I am, save in dimmest vaguest generalities—bounded by space and time, bounded by inability to weigh spirit in balances or to imagine the moment after death? The dissolute mind may dream anything: the girt-up mind knows sleep from waking.

But, when St Peter wrote, ‘Gird up the loins of your mind,’ be we well assured that the Galilean fisherman, with his memories of the sleep at Gethsemane and the three denials reversed by the three confessions, was not thinking of schools and universities, of libraries full of books or laboratories equipped for analysis. The ‘mind’ of which he wrote was the rock-hewn element of thinking, equally available, for its highest processes and purposes, in palace and cottage, in philosopher and peasant. It needs not education in man’s sense, classical or scientific, to gird its loins for the enterprise St Peter has in view. That enterprise is the knowledge of a Father, in a Saviour, and in a Spirit: it were not the knowledge man needs if it required either books or tools or materials of any kind to

teach it. The enterprise is a personal knowledge, the girding up of the loins for it is a personal exertion.

Shall we try to sketch one or two of the particulars of that girding? You can add to them.

(1) 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty. Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul—like a weaned child on the breast of its mother.' Humility—queen of graces towards God and man. But chief element (we say now) of that mind-girding which is our subject.

In reference to all knowledge, what is the chief hindrance? Is it not vanity? Is it not the 'saying, We see?' Yes, it may give a superficial quickness—the quickness of a clever guessing, the quickness of a lucky anticipation. But give me rather (as a teacher) the honest confession, 'Sir, I do not understand;' the dull plodding, 'Sir, I am doing my best;' that gradual dawning, that first clearing of the brow, that beautiful beginning to know.

Gird up the loins of your mind—first of all, by a deep humility. 'Thou art near, they tell me, O Lord: but I am so far off—so ignorant, so stupid, so sin-bound—O quicken me.'

Do you ask how humility can gird up mind?

You would not ask if you had ever been a

schoolmaster. A great tutor at Cambridge used to begin his lectures by begging his scholars to forget all their previous knowledge—give me a sheet of blank paper, I can write upon it.

O for the blank paper in the things of God !
O for the conscious ignorance, which knows nothing—knows neither the whence nor the whither nor even the where—knows only that it wants knowledge, and lies here to be taught of God !

I have scarcely the heart to pass on. So beautiful does this humility look to me. So do I long for it, as they who long for the morning. So near does it lie, in my judgment, to the very sight of the King in His beauty.

(2) But next to it I would place its sister grace—which is patience. That divine *ὑπομονή* of which we speak so often—made up of two ingredients—*submissive waiting*. That upward look which acknowledges dependence, and that onward look which believes in eternity—which knows that with the Lord a thousand years are as one day—which therefore is ‘willing to wait.’

Was there ever a time when patience, thus interpreted, was, so difficult perhaps, yet certainly so needful ?

Such perplexities in things temporal—scant supplies for hungry thousands, made more scanty by a silly impatience, traded upon by

false flatterers; social inequalities, naturally felt—social selfishnesses, naturally resented; crude remedies, hurriedly obtruded—political expedients, reckless of consequences; worse than these, if worse there can be, rude utterances of half-truths, accepted by some as the whole of truth, condemned by others as no truth at all, nibbled at, not grappled with, by others, the would-be wise men—bearing fruit in suspended faiths, in covert unbeliefs, in a fashionable agnosticism, in a vulgar atheism—all these working together to make a beautiful earth a desert, and a delicious life a dead sea. Patience—‘the Lord is in His holy temple.’

Patience, perhaps above all, for the reconciliation of apparently contradictory principles, and the harmonizing of certain parts of Revelation with the character of God Himself the Revealer.

Be willing to wait. Not indolently, not in indifference, not as those who wrap themselves in their virtue or wrap themselves in their faith, careless of the multitude, careless of the race—but in the twofold definition of the grace which we are magnifying—a submissive waiting.

(3) Humility—patience—last, hope.

What is hope? We have defined patience.

Hope is the expectation—more or less confident, for it admits of degrees—of a pleasant future.

Are the terms inadequate? Not so—certainly they are scriptural.

‘That pleasant land.’ ‘They thought scorn,’ it is written of some, ‘of that pleasant land.’

‘Hope to the end,’ St Peter says,—‘Hope perfectly’ are his very words—meaning doubtless, perseveringly and amidst all obstacles.

‘Saved by hope,’ St Paul is not afraid to say—for hope is but a name for faith when the things in question are future.

And St Peter makes hope very definite when he adds, ‘for the grace that is being brought to us’—for already it is on its way—‘at the unveiling of Jesus Christ.’

It cannot be that this scene of confusion should be for ever. As God is true, as God is holy, as God is merciful, it shall not. The Nativity was heralded with the promise of joy—great joy—joy to all nations. We cannot call it this yet: we see not as yet how it shall be. But, where explanation fails, where reason fails, where revelation itself fails, hope fails not. Hope, which is faith’s foresight, sees things which are not as though they were, and hears a voice say from the excellent glory, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ ‘We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.’

‘Gird up then the loins of your mind.’ Away

with this looseness, this slovenliness, this slatternliness, of thinking! Be ashamed of the wandering, the scattered, the incoherent imaginings, the perpetual to and fro, the discreditable suspense, which you have lived in till now. Let the past suffice you. Awaken now to a worthier, a manlier, a nobler condition. Say, if you can say no more, On a consideration of the whole case, on a balance of probabilities, as a man who must decide one way, and can only decide, in this or anything, to the best of his judgment, I cast in my lot with the Christian. Let me die his death, let my last end be like his. Therefore his life must be mine. 'Lord, I believe.' 'Thomas answered and said unto Him,' I say with him—he too once doubted—'My Lord and my God.' If I am wrong, I err with the chief among ten thousand—I err with the bravest, the saintliest, the most beautiful, of mankind. Only let me not be found halting between two opinions—today half a Christian, tomorrow more than half an infidel. There must be an end of this vacillation, if the salt would be fit either for land or dunghill. Humility—patience—hope—these three. I am resolved what to do. Come life, come death, I am a Christian.

TEMPLE CHURCH,
March 20, 1892.

XXI.

THE PATHETIC SIDE OF INFIDELITY.

Deuteronomy xxxii. 31.

For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.

MODERN infidelity has many tones and many voices. Some of these are insolent and arrogant—they drive us at once to a distance. There is just one which is deeply pathetic—I can never hear it unmoved. It is that which confesses that its rock is not as our Rock ; that its reasonings and its discoveries have not enriched but impoverished ; that it has no pleasant land to offer to its followers, only a wilderness barren and desolate, a heaven above them brass and an earth underfoot iron.

Moses the man of God, hero leader and law-giver, hero prophet and poet, is here reading to his people, before he leaves them, the story of their chequered future. The day will come, he tells them, when a single foeman shall chase a

thousand of them, and two such foemen shall put ten thousand of them to flight. And he asks how can this be? How can you explain a rout so disastrous and so ignominious? How should one chase a thousand, except their Rock had sold them—in other words, unless their God had given them up? No rival rock, no new divinity, entering the lists with the God of Israel, could have thus turned the scale: ‘their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.’ Again and again, when the ark of God came into the camp, Philistia trembled: if it is otherwise now, for some mysterious reason God has withdrawn Himself.

It is not always, we say, that infidelity is modest—but it does sometimes weep while it destroys. ‘The sun shines upon me,’ it has said, ‘out of an empty heaven: I feel with all the bitterness of bereavement that the divine Companion is dead.’ The eyes of an inherited blindness are at last opened, but it is only to show us that we are naked.

Such candour may be rare. But it bears witness to a great reality, which I would make our subject this morning.

‘Their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges.’

Unbelief asks of us a tremendous sacrifice. It may be necessary to make it—that is to be

proved—but let us not drift into it or play over it: rather let us anxiously and tremblingly count the cost. It may be—it may be—that the immensity of the sacrifice demanded has in it an argument, not of feeling only but of reason, against it.

I am treating Revelation, for the moment, as a great whole. We know of course that infidelity sometimes nibbles, and leaves it to a bolder atheism to devour. But it is of the nature of scepticism, as a habit or temper, to spread (as St Paul says) ‘as doth a gangrene;’ and many thousands are they who, beginning with the criticism of one fact or one doctrine, have not rested till they left themselves neither Bible nor Gospel remaining.

‘Our Rock,’ to use the figure of the text, is the God of the Christian Revelation. Our enemy’s rock is a divinity of man’s construction, however many or however few it may admit of the characteristics of the Other.

Let me boldly and briefly name one or two of the attributes of our Rock.

I. And first, the divine personality.

Our Lord said to the twelve apostles, at a moment of general defection, ‘Will ye also go away?’ St Peter, consciously or unconsciously realizing the fundamental importance of the point now before us, answered, ‘Lord, to whom

shall we go?' not 'whither,' you observe, but 'to whom?'

Yes, he felt, though he did not say, that the want of man is a Person. A thing will not satisfy him: no, not the most beautiful of ideas; no, not the most satisfactory of philosophies: man wants, and must have, a Person. He wants, and must have, some one above himself to worship, to trust, to love.

Personality is a formal and an abstract word, but you see what we want it for. We want it as the expression of a Father, of a Saviour, of a Spirit—quite out of ourselves, and yet as close to us as our own soul. We want some one whom we can fly to in trouble, confide in in weakness, trust with our innermost secrets with which no stranger can intermeddle. That is personality: call it by another name if you can find one.

We know that infidelity may leave us this, or a part of this. May, or may not. May leave it tentatively, and in suspense. But it is of its nature to take it away, or perhaps to leave it now and come again for it.

2. And secondly, the forgiveness of sins.

We know that in some modern theologies sin takes new names. At worst, it is a weakness—it is a defect, or it is an excess—it is a mistake, or it is an inconvenience, or it is a malady—per-

haps in the long run it is a discipline or an education. Meanwhile this I know—that it disturbs and distresses me; that in certain acute forms it robs me of my sleep and my appetite; that it deprives me of my bold step and my confident bearing and my forthright eye before my fellows; that at all events something within reminds me of it, tortures me about it, even where it is a secret between me and myself—gives me no peace till I can either forget or cancel it, and shows me no way of doing either.

Therefore it must be a wonderful boon if I am told, on good authority, that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. ‘Son, thy sins are forgiven thee’ would be a very gospel of gospels to me, might I but hear it.

And it is very well to say that sin is not sinful; or to say, on the other hand, that sin cannot be unsinned, must be left as it is, to bear its fruit in consequence, and to know no other cure but forgetfulness: this does not meet the case, does not heal the remorse, does not repair the mischief, does not set the sinner free to work, because it sets him not free to hope. Forgiveness is a name not yet named: till it is named, I am crippled and I am helpless still.

But forgiveness of sins is named in Revelation. It is the key-stone of the Gospel. And

not forgiveness only as a hope, but in definite connexion with an atonement. This is the first thing that must go if infidelity is to be let in. Infidelity has no tolerance, and no counterfeit that I know of, for atonement. It is one of the unsavable dogmas of a Saviour that could not save Himself.

O how old are the cavils of the new infidelity! They were uttered first, so as never to be improved upon, under the very cross itself.

3. Yet one third thing. The lawfulness, the reality, and the efficacy, of prayer.

We do not wonder that infidelity has fastened upon prayer as one of its unintelligible, unreasonable, amiable but impossible things. How ready to hand are the old cavils! How shall man stay or guide the hand of God? How shall the thing done be undone, how shall the thing decreed be changed, how shall consequence be divorced from cause, how shall the clean thing be brought out of the unclean? If prayer can do anything, prove it to me, show it me. Pray for ten lives, pray for one out of ten lives, in one ward of a hospital—bring me them whole, bring it me sound—and I will see and believe. Ignorant ridiculous confusion of thought and thing! This it is to ‘limit the Holy One:’ this it is to demand a sign from heaven, instead of the signs which He has been pleased to vouchsafe.

‘Their rock is not as our Rock’ for this third reason—he hears not prayer.

4. Can we add yet a fourth?

‘Life and immortality brought to light by the gospel.’

What has ‘their rock’ to tell of a world beyond death?

A guess, a peradventure, a possibility of a something based upon a nothing—at best, a recognition of angel faces loved and lost—at best, a resumption, in some spoilt and damaged form, of relationships formed here and broken—at best, an absorption into the great ocean or fountain of being, impassive, impersonal, unconscious, irresponsible.

Where in all this is St Paul’s ‘persuasion’ that One ‘known’ as well as ‘believed’ will ‘guard his deposit,’ the life and soul entrusted to Him, ‘against that day’—a day as real as if it could be dated—and this, on the strength of another ‘deposit,’ a revelation of faith and truth ‘once for all delivered?’

Like the personality of the divine, like the forgiveness of sins, like the efficacy of prayer, the life beyond death is a part of the sacrifice demanded: each and all to be held in suspense and on sufferance till the next breath of a boundless scepticism shall sweep each in turn, or all together, into the limbo of evaporated superstitions.

‘Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.’ These are the kinds of sacrifice demanded of us—count them, measure them, weigh them well. We say not, Refuse to disbelieve because the sacrifice is too great for you: we say only at present, Count well the cost. Many men are drifting into infidelity without any such calculation. They see no imprudence in listening to the caviller, while he confines himself to the outworks—they can stop where they will, the citadel is not threatened. Many young men listen, repeat, propagate—mean no harm by it—continue to worship in public, kneel as they did aforetime in secret; and only awaken to the first consciousness of danger by finding the mercy-seat empty and the prayer flung back to them wingless.

We take an onward step—and we end with it. The greatness of the sacrifice is not perhaps, in itself, a decisive reason for declining it—but it has in it not only a voice of warning, but an argument also against the necessity of making it.

These four characteristics of our Rock in contrast with theirs correspond to four wants in us, which cry aloud for their satisfaction. A personal God—the forgiveness of sins—the reality of prayer—a life after death—these are so

many conditions of a tolerable existence for beings such as we are: deny them, withdraw them, make them dubious, make them improbable, and you reduce us to that state of which it is written, 'Good were it for that man if he had not been born.'

These are wants, primary wants, of human nature. These things are not superfluities or luxuries of the being—they are of the life deep down, the life which touches the mother earth of humanity, and is common to all sorts and conditions of men.

Some of these wants, it is true, are not original, if by original you mean that first perfection of human nature upon which God looked and pronounced it to be very good. One of the four implies that something has happened since that day—something which has sullied the first purity and marred the original beauty. That mysterious intruder which we call evil in its essence, sin in its action, has made a vast change, we all admit, in God's human handy-work. It has introduced wants which were not there before it—wants which you might call accidental, certainly adventitious, in comparison with the other three, a divine Person, communication with Him, which is prayer, and an immortal life in His presence.

And we could quite understand, that this

arrival, this alien presence, with all its terrible workings in deteriorating and defiling, might have rendered it necessary, as certainly it would have been just, to annihilate that part of creation into which it had entered, or to place it in a position entirely penal, 'reserved in chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day.' The former of these consequences did not follow: the sin-stained creation is continued in being. The latter, a condition merely penal, no true observer can recognize in the mixed scene before us, in which beneficence is at least as visible as suffering, and an alternative, alike of conduct and condition, is evidently open to the choice and experience of the individual man.

The true account of the matter is this—that a fourth want has been added to the three of which Paradise was not ignorant. The forgiveness of sins has become as urgent a necessity to the fallen humanity, as a divine Person, access to Him in prayer, and a beautiful immortality, were always, and from the first moment, to man as God made him.

The argument from want is one of the most powerful in its bearing upon the great subject of religion. Prove a want, and there is but one supposition which can exclude the inference of a supply. We speak of real wants, not imaginary. We speak of natural wants, whether original or

adventitious—wants of the being as God made it, or wants of the being damaged yet surviving: we speak of these, not of such as differentiate circumstance or condition, individual or race. And, so speaking, we say that, except on one supposition, the existence of a want is the promise of its supply.

That one supposition is, an indifferent or a malevolent God. Are the words frightful? I trust so. There is no nature so far gone from righteousness as not to resent and rebuke the hypothesis. Of course there is another: the hypothesis of the fool, who says in his heart—the hypothesis of the atheist, who says with his lips if he can find a listener—There is no God. Scepticism looks that way—is knocking at the wicket-gate of that dark comfortless path; but there is a long distance as yet between the start and the goal: at present we may assume in the congregation the existence of a God, and we may reckon upon the instant repudiation of the suggestion of a God not compassionate but malevolent, a God not love but hate.

And without this we say that the existence of a want is an argument, strong if not conclusive, for the existence of a supply. If our Rock has, and their rock has not, the satisfaction of the four imperious wants of which we have made mention this morning, that possession, that offer,

itself commends the one and discredits the other. We say, It is not that the one takes my fancy, suits my inclination, humours my caprice, indulges my self-will, and therefore, true or false, I prefer Him and swear by Him—it is this rather, There is a Voice here which speaks into me, speaks with authority, speaks as one who knows, yea, speaks as He who made me : some one I must have, outside me, above me, yet also caring for me, entering into my life, entering into my soul—and here I have such a one. O God, Thou art my God—to whom else shall I go? My resolution is taken, and I shall not swerve from it—‘This God is my God for ever and ever: He shall be my Guide unto death.’

TEMPLE CHURCH,

April 3, 1892.

XXII.

TWO CITIZENSHIPS.

Acts xxi. 31.

A citizen of no mean city.

Philippians iii. 20.

Our citizenship is in heaven.

Two citizenships are here before us—combined and contrasted.

One of the two is literal, the other figurative—both equally real.

‘A citizen of no mean city’ St Paul calls himself as a man born in Tarsus. At a critical moment, just rescued from a raging mob, and with all manner of perils around and before him, he cannot help giving to his birthplace an affectionate and complimentary epithet, unnecessary for the present purpose, but indicative of an habitual feeling—very natural, very human—helpful, therefore, to that estimate of him which friends and foes are apt to agree in obscuring.

Tarsus was no mean, no unmarked, city. Alexander the Great had bathed in its river. Julius Cæsar had visited the place, and tried to rename it after himself. It was classed with Athens and Alexandria as a school of literature. Its citizens were regarded as singularly eager for what we now call the higher education. On all these accounts St Paul was proud of it. Great men are generally tender about their birthplace. They are fond of connecting it with its illustrious neighbouring families. They treasure any local tradition which does it honour. We like to feel that St Paul was one of us in these instincts of a minor but very true patriotism.

St Paul had other earthly citizenships besides that of his birthplace. He loves to dwell on the memory of a youth spent in Jerusalem—at the feet of Gamaliel, the great tutor and professor, from whom he learned many things, but failed to learn, probably did not wish to learn, Gamaliel's characteristic virtue—toleration. St Paul's was too ardent a nature to be satisfied with simple suspense—waiting to see whether time would ratify a religion: he must know at once, that he might either stamp it out, or adopt it. In one instance, he did both, by turns.

But for Jerusalem he had a passion. He was an Israelite through and through. He was a

citizen of *that* not mean city. To the end he maintained that he was only interpreting its religion, only confessing his nationality in being a Christian. He speaks of the commonwealth (or polity) of Israel as that from which it was dearth and death to be an alien.

Besides these two citizenships he had a third. He had the citizenship of Rome. We know not how—but he tells the chief captain that he was a Roman citizen by birth, not (like him) by purchase. Sometimes he pleaded it, sometimes not. He submitted at Philippi, he did not submit here, to that terrible scourge from which the citizenship of Rome was exempt. Possibly, at Philippi—it is but conjecture—he would not let Silas (who may not have had the citizenship) suffer alone—he would share his torture. It was like him, if it was so.

Then there was a fourth citizenship, of which the second text tells—it was the citizenship of heaven. So we pass from the literal to the figurative. St Paul realized the invisible; saw his real Sovereign out of sight; lived the life of the other world in this; had his unwritten statute-book, the mind of the Spirit—his new-made relations, made for him by the Gospel—not fellow-citizens only, but, closer still than these, mother and sisters and brothers—one chapter of his Epistles is full of their very names

—in fulfilment of Christ's most true promise, 'There is no man that hath left home or kindred for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive manifold more in this present time—houses and brethren and sisters and mothers, with persecutions—and in the end eternal life.'

'Our citizenship is in heaven.'

The two citizenships are our subject today—and we take St Paul for our text in both.

St Paul was not ashamed as a Christian to remember Tarsus, and even to boast of it. 'A not unmarked city' he called it—what shall we Englishmen say of our Tarsus, our great and greater Britain? Is it a country worth living for? At a time promising to decide important questions, to define policies, to start England on a five or a seven years' course in one direction or another, involving the welfare or the dishonour of British citizenship all the world over—not to speak of more vital interests nearer home—does any duty lie upon us individually? May we stand idly by, and let others act for us? May we go lightly and indifferently (this coming week) to exercise our citizenship at hap-hazard? May we resign ourselves into the hands of other people, of personal likings and dislikings, of leaders who are names to us, of intentions which are a blank, or principles which are written in water? Or are we bound, as citizens not of earth

only but of heaven, to make enquiry, to examine for ourselves, to use thought, to have a reason, to pray for a right judgment? If we cannot do these things for ourselves—the last-named no one can do for us—are we not bound to take advice, not of the violent partisan who can give us only heat, only passion, but of the wisest and most thoughtful to whom we have access, and, having done all to inform ourselves, still to kneel in heart while we give the vote?

‘How unpainstaking for most men is the search for truth!’ The last distortion of fact, the latest misrepresentation of speech, the twice and thrice exposed fallacy, the most audacious, most insolent lie—these unmanly, these cowardly weapons are the things that tell with the multitude: you say them, another tears them to shreds, and the people that heard you do not hear him. Great is the power of the lie: even the candid auditor is apt to think that there must be something in it!

A citizen of Tarsus was a citizen of no mean city—compare him for one moment, in his privilege or in his responsibility, with the citizen of England. The glorious constitution in Church and State, which men used perhaps too proudly or too indolently to boast of, has it no meaning, no value, now? The growth of long ages, in both its parts; the result of centuries of wise

adaptation and of equally wise letting alone; the product of ages of open eyes and cautious feet, of much reflection and many a wise delay, of a thousand bold hearts and ten thousand loyal hands—does it not deserve something of us, its custodians for a generation? something in the justice of its appreciation, something in the reverence of its handling?

Enough if we will feel, as well as call it, ‘no mean city.’ Enough if we will disengage ourselves from party, and be men in intelligence and in independence. Enough if we will carry to the exercise of citizenship, in each particular instance, a mind that has thought, a heart that has felt, and a soul that has prayed.

St Paul could remember Tarsus although, nay because, he had become a Christian. It could not have been an unmixed joy to him, that childhood and boyhood spent there, when he throws back upon it the light of Christ and the Gospel. Its population, where it was not heathen, was Jewish—alike and equally Christless. When he returned there for those six years after his conversion, till Barnabas sought him out and carried him to Antioch, great must have been his isolation, painful his severance from old friends, self-denying, self-sacrificing his new mission, in which (if we rightly read his later summary of sufferings) he encountered

many of those shipwrecks, that 'night and day in the deep,' for which we find no room in the brief biography of the Acts. Yet all this did not destroy the earthly citizenship, while it endeared and enhanced the heavenly.

To this last we turn our latest thoughts, satisfied that there only shall we find the key to all Christian living, even that part of Christian living which has its home and scene in the politics and the citizenships of earth.

'Our citizen-life is already in heaven.' Such is the true reading of the wonderful saying.

Citizenship is the opposite of several things. It is the opposite of slavery, it is the opposite of isolation, it is the opposite of lawlessness. Citizenship is no licence, citizenship is no communism, citizenship is no republicanism. When St Paul described himself and all who are like-minded with him as citizens of a city in heaven, he had specially in view (as he tells us) the person of a Sovereign, whose law is written upon hearts, whose will is the will of the people, whose presence is the capital, whose coming is the prospect which makes the sufferings and the trials and the deferred hopes of the present bearable, because promising to compensate all with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Citizens of heaven, he says, live your citizen-

ship. Already in heaven, be not conformed to earth—eternity, not time, is your date and note of age, let men take knowledge of you that you belong to and ‘inhabit’ it.

‘Our citizen-life is in heaven’—and the first mark of it must be its elevation. St Paul makes it the opposite of ‘minding earthly things,’ that is, of having the things of earth for our one subject and object—for the one subject of our thought and the one object of our affection. Brethren, it is a discriminating word—in some shape or other, what else have we for ours? Who can help being interested in this interesting life—so rich in enjoyment, at least for the ten thousand—so beautiful in spectacle, at least for the observant—so full of incident, at least for the now living? How shall we even wish to look on with blunted sense, or to take our part in it with a half-heart?

Is it religion, is it Christianity, not to mind earthly things? Where were eloquence, where were statesmanship, where were influence, where were improvement, but for a mind alive and awake to the earthly? What could so disparage the Gospel, as to make it a listless indolent sleepy on-looker, a dull gloomy preoccupied bystander, while the drama of a generation plays itself out in full view?

This then is not—we may be quite sure—

what St Paul means by the elevation to which he calls us. We ought to be deeply, anxiously, personally interested in the life's life of the age. We ought to be keen observers, we ought to be active users, we ought to be ardent lovers, of the life that now is. We ought to account nothing human alien :—how did Jesus Christ Himself, when He was upon earth, take interest in every thing—not alone in the cares and wants and woes, not alone in the hunger or sickness or mourning, of the world which He came to save, but also in the innocent pleasures, the family joys, the very games and pastimes of its children. We do not perhaps quite see St Paul in this aspect—for we picture him as a man of grave and anxious temperament, a man of ceaseless toil and feeble health and often infirmity, living most of all in the great future, bent above all things upon making others sure of it. We do not conceive of him as having a specially instructed eye for nature, or a keenly interested attention for national or imperial politics. He is the apostolic exemplar of the other side (rather) of humanity : yet even he was a man of sensitive tenderness, of intense sympathy, of yearning love. His elevation was no disdain, his spirituality was no coldness.

‘Our citizen-life is already in heaven’ is no call to dreaminess, no call to contempt. But it

is a call to spirituality. It does bid us to take heed lest this life be our all. It does say to us, Beyond, above, within this life, there is a life more real, more satisfying, and therefore more concerning. Let your interest in the present never stagnate into worldliness, never degenerate into godlessness. Let the heavenly citizenship shine through into the earthly, making it sparkle, making it kindle, making it cheer and warm and cleanse.

To do this, it must take account of itself—what it is, and why. The citizen-life is the life, first of all, of a subject. It has a King—so perfect, that all hearts and all characters find in Him their ideal—so beautiful, that He is God's image—so loving, that He shed His blood for us. Secondly, it is a life of law-abiding law-loving subordination. For the first time that problem of problems has been solved by it—the will moves in harmony with the will of the Law-giver. Not by the force of threats and penalties, but by the influence of a loving constraining indwelling Spirit, the mind 'prevents and follows' the guidance which is its law. Thirdly, it is a life of fellowship. The citizen of heaven does not expect to be the one only thought and care of his King. True, he is as much so as if he were the only one. But each one is equally so. And therefore, when he moves among his fellows—

when he comes back from the worship of the capital, which is the spiritual presence of his King, to live the other life, which is the seen and the temporal—he brings back with him into it an accommodating, a generous, a self-forgetting spirit: much forgiven, he loves much—alike the divine Source of love and its human fellow-objects.

The subject seems to have a word in it suitable to these times.

The citizen of heaven must not, of course, allow the earthly (in any shape) to engross or absorb him. The competitions of earth must not irritate, the disappointments of earth must not sour him. If he is thrown into the arena of debate and dispute—whether it be the debating of senates, or the competitions which fill senates—he must not allow one word to pass the door of his lips which has in it the least tinge either of bitterness or of insult or of suspicion. The man who speaks comes forth from and must go back to the communion of a spiritual King, whom it is his office to represent and to recommend everywhere to other hearts and lives wanting Him as much as his own.

There is this also in the citizenship of which we have spoken—that it has to give not only kindness to all speech and charity to all intercourse, but also soberness of mind and thought

in estimating the proportions of all subjects submitted to it for judgment. It cannot be denied that there is a tendency in political life to the disturbance of this equilibrium. Very trifling differences are apt to be exaggerated when they affect the immediate interests of party. In all such questions commend me to the man who realizes the apostolic saying, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' Such a man will rise above the question, Who shall be the greatest? to whose hands shall the honour of ruling a noble nation be entrusted? into the higher question, How shall the glory of God—which is, in other words, how shall the cause of righteousness, the true welfare of a people, its health of soul, mind, and body—be promoted? how shall it be lifted higher in the scale of nations as to that which concerns its honour, its truth, its purity, its enlightenment?

How few are they whose career as statesmen has been marked by achievements in the cause of philanthropy pure and simple! How few, in comparison with the adroit manipulators of political combinations which leave behind them no record on the tablets of history as it is written in heaven!

Where the citizen-life of the other world is lived vividly and powerfully in this, it will leave traces behind it when it passes within the veil.

Traces in personal influence upon lives that come after. Traces also, in proportion to the opportunities vouchsafed to it, upon other men's estimate of things great and insignificant, things mean and lofty, things worthy of being lived and died for and things foredoomed to perish with the using.

Be it ours so to use the brief time and the earth-bounded space allotted to us, as that the heavenly citizenship shall affect the earthly, and men shall take knowledge of us—if they confess it not till we are gone—that we had another life than this, and that that other life, being interpreted, was a life hidden with Christ in God.

TEMPLE CHURCH,

June 26, 1892.

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,

July 3, 1892.

XXIII.

THE VISION OF THE VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES.

Ezekiel xxxvii. 9.

Then said He unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

ALL else was done. The scattered bones that lay in multitudes on the face of the valley—mementos perhaps of some battle of the olden time—had come together once more, ‘bone to his bone.’ Sinews and flesh and skin had come over them: the framework was complete. Skeleton first, then carcase—the material man was perfect. But there was no breath, no spirit, no life. To give that required a new process: the text describes it. The son of man, the priest-prophet Ezekiel, is bidden to prophesy, to speak in God’s name, to the wind—bid it come from its four quarters, and breathe upon these slain, these old corpses, once disjointed bone by

bone, now reconstructed by miracle, but lying there breathless, spiritless, lifeless—to breathe upon them that they may live.

The same word, in Greek and Latin and Hebrew, means the three things, wind, and breath, and spirit. The same charge might be read, ‘Prophesy to the wind,’ or ‘Prophesy to the breath,’ or ‘Prophesy to the spirit.’ There is the same ambiguity in a great passage in the 3rd chapter of St John, ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof’—or, ‘The spirit breatheth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof.’ And so, once again, in the 104th Psalm, where the Prayer-Book Version reads, ‘When Thou lettest Thy breath go forth, they shall be made,’ the Bible rendering is, ‘Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created, and Thou renewest the face of the earth.’ The question is only, in each case, exactly where figure ends and interpretation begins. Wind and breath (in the supernatural world) are figures—spirit is interpretation. Here is difficulty—here is the call for judgment too, in translators first, and then in interpreters, of the Bible.

Ezekiel prophesies as he is commanded, and the breath came into the lifeless bodies, ‘and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.’

The regathering of these scattered bones—the reclothing of these skeletons with sinew, flesh, and skin—the revival of these corpses by the entrance into them of the breath of life—is expressly made a parable of the resurrection of the chosen people from the living death of their seventy years' exile in Babylon. 'Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.'

But when we have given back to the Jewish people the original ownership of the prophecy, of which they have been robbed, as of that of so many others, by the hasty allegorizing and spiritualizing of interpreters and commentators, is there nothing left for us of this day—nothing for our nation, nothing for our church, nothing for the soul that is in each one?

Ezekiel has been carried in spirit into a weird and wild valley—one of the ravines, perhaps, which hem in on two or three sides the city of his fathers, so often made present to him (in his exile at Babylon) in dream and vision, 'whether in the body or out of the body he cannot tell'—and the valley thus visited is a charnel-house of bones. Three things are prominent—the multitude, the dryness, and the isolation.

We shall not stay to draw out the figure in detail in its national application. But who does not do it for himself when once the thought is suggested? What are the despairing things in the problem this day presented to the statesman, to the philanthropist, to the Christian, as any one of the three gives his mind to the study of his dear, his suffering, his unmanageable people? Is not indeed multitude the first of them? The population has outgrown its spot of earth; has outgrown its home supplies and resources; has outgrown its civilizing influences; has outgrown its means of grace. A wide world is before this overgrown population: there is a greater Britain, there is a greater than Britain: there is the Britain of the colonies, there is the greater than Britain of the new world, of the whole earth beyond. All these want the cultivator, want the trader, want the man. But unhappily they do not want the kind of man that is super-numerary at home: to help him to emigrate is to help him to starve: superfluous here, then superfluous there: the right man to emigrate is just the man who cannot be spared and who has no need to go.

But if multitude is one despairing thought, another is that which the vision showed as dryness. These bones had lain so long upon the face of the valley, that not only the moisture,

but the very capacity of moisture, is gone out of them. I know not that any figure could be more expressive, might we but catch the point of it. 'They were very many,' says the vision, 'and behold, they were very dry.' Not only the divine unction, the human grace also, is gone out of them. What is sometimes called 'the milk of human kindness'—that indescribable something which ought to be capable of being appealed to as sure to respond, that appreciation of kindness in the motive, in the intention, in the effort to serve, that meeting half-way the fellow-feeling of love—all this seems to have been (as the vision would say) dried up and dried out of the human being which meets us in the streets and lanes, the high-roads and hedges, into which the messenger of an unselfish compassion tries to make his way: the bones are very many—that is not the worst of it—they are also by long habit, of neglect on the one side, of suspicion on the other, so utterly dry. They have lain there so long that every relic, every reminiscence, of moisture, of tenderness and suppleness, is gone out of them.

There is yet a third despairing thing—it is the isolation. Each bone, of the once one compact frame, lies apart and separate. The parable is too easily read. The corporate life, as we speak, is extinct in vast masses of our

people. Patriotism, loyalty, public spirit, are not ideas, not names, only, they are jests and gibes. 'Every man for himself' is the hateful maxim—hateful enough if it were all, but there is a companion maxim—'and every man's hand against his brother.'

We could understand this and make allowance for it, if it were confined to the starving, sickening, outcast thousands who can only look on upon the luxury, the waste, the arrogance of the upper hundreds who just stare upon them from their carriages and take for granted, without thanks and without acknowledgment, the toil, the sweat of the brow, which they live upon. But the isolation of which we speak is far wider than this in its selfishness. It divides whole classes, whole ranks, from each other, even where common interests, could they but be seen as they are, would most closely, most intimately, unite them.

The bones in the valley of vision were very many and very dry, and they lay disjoined and disjoined along the valley. The very first sign of hope was the bones coming together. There was a shaking first—might we but see that preliminary shaking in some of the questionings, social or religious, which agitate us at this moment! Better, men say, any agitation than any stagnation—and we partly believe it. But

it is difficult, in the discords of this present, to see the hopeful sign thus inferred from them.

We turn for a moment from the social to the religious aspect. We have spoken of despairing things in the one—it would be wearisome to pursue the same analogy in the other. Rather let us stand still and see how we read the signs of the times here, quite in general.

Multitude—dryness—isolation—yes, they are all here.

It is not only the difficulty (though that is enormous) of providing for what we call the spiritual destitution of the masses — masses springing up suddenly in valley and mountain, in harbour and hamlet, in town and country. We would look more broadly at the religion of our times.

Certainly it has multitude. Legion is its superscription. This of itself is perplexing: perplexing any way: deeply depressing to the lover of order, to the educated churchman who must have the exact thing or nothing. We would rather cast a rapid glance at the valley of the present, in its religious aspect, apart from the question of uniformity. It is sad to see the seamless coat rent. It is sad to see precious truths torn each from each: a little scrap of truth made the whole of it—made reason enough for creating a sect and a schism: preaching

isolated from praying—praying itself turned into preaching: human popes made out of eminent ministers—Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, or their poor 19th century travesties, made into heads of sects, heads of parties, or heads of schools. It is sad to see the mutual jealousies, rivalries, controversies, of all these—is Christ divided? It is sad to see the world let in upon the Church, the Church mixed up with the world. The bones are many, the bones are dry, the ‘bones lie scattered round the pit as when one breaketh and heweth wood upon the earth.’

There is not much use perhaps in bewailing these things. They have made sad havoc of the beautiful Gospel. It is idle to sit wishing for what men call union—generally meaning by it uniformity; generally meaning by it a uniformity to be brought about by the unconditional surrender of all but one form to *the* one. It is too late—or too soon—for this. The one hope now for religion is the practical confederation (without much talking about it, without programme or treaty of peace) of all schools and all parties, of all sects and all churches against what ought to be the common foe of all—ignorance and profaneness and infidelity and sin. And, in order to this, a spiritual unity—the holding of a unity of spirit in the bond of peace. ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and

breathe upon these slain, that they may live'—live each first, live then all.

We hasten to our last use of the text, which is the individual.

Here we feel ourselves on safe ground; dealing, as all would wish us to deal, with the real man—the man within the man—the man as God sees him—the man as he lies naked and opened before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

And is it fanciful to see a valley full of dry bones within the continent of the one being?

I know not the individual working of a multitude of consciences—I know but the working of one.

Multitude—dryness—isolation—have those words, those despairing things we have called them, no meaning for the man? Has the scattering of Babel, the very confusion of tongues, no parable for the individual?

O how many provinces, how many islands and continents are there in one life, in one bosom! The disunion which works all around works first within. O, if there were peace within, how many discords would be precluded or healed around. Uncertain tempers, inordinate affections, unruly passions, hurtful lusts—desire of things forbidden, indisposition to things commanded—doubts about revealed truth, alienation

from God in His beauty and His holiness—questionings what to think of Christ—suspenses about things vital to faith, vital to hope, vital to charity—these are the things spoken of when we make the vision personal. Then we see the bones lying everywhere up and down the valley which is the soul, the life's life, the man: we see him restless, discontented, inconsistent, vacillating, self-contradicting; thinking this today, doubting this tomorrow; 'almost persuaded' today, like the traditional Agrippa—thinking conviction too sudden, too precarious, like the Agrippa of the revised text and the revised version, tomorrow; never continuing in one stay, nay, never taking the decisive step towards an assured faith and a life founded upon a rock. The bones are very many, even in the valley of the personal vision—and they are very dry.

'It lacked moisture' is St Luke's account of the second kind of ground in the parable of the Sower, and it too well describes the soul's soul of too many. The bones were dry. They had lain long and idle on that old battle-field—the battle-field of Paradise and the Fall and the exile, of the Cherubim guarding the gate and the flaming sword keeping the way of the tree of life. The days are long and many since then, and each day has added something to the dryness and hardness of the bones which are

the hearts of men. Even for the individual the drying and the hardening have been going on for long years. The days are far in the background when the old story of the cross could move and stir and rouse them—when in childhood and boyhood they perhaps knew what it was to grow pale within before a lie told or a fault concealed, to lose rest and sleep because they had displeased a father or distressed a mother to count it a dangerous thing to have lain down or risen without a prayer, to have thought a sin or uttered an oath, to have left the Bible unopened for one day or the church unvisited for one Sunday. All those are things of the far past. Now the bones are dry as well as scattered: the virtue is gone out of them which could either weep or feel: now the tale of suffering awakens in them no compassion; their nearest and dearest may be weak and they are not weak, may be offended and they burn not. The bones are dry.

And they are disjointed, they are isolated, in the valley: selfishness is in their heart, selfishness is in their life, selfishness is in their religion. It is ever so. Alienation from God is always isolation from man.

There is no need to traverse this part of the ground: we all plead guilty to the charge of selfishness. Rather let us listen to what the

vision tells of as the steps of the revival. We can trace them more clearly in the individual case than in the collective.

There is, first, what the prophet calls a 'noise'—the margin of the revised version calls it a 'thundering:' a 'shaking'—the revised version calls it an 'earthquake.' What is it in the man?

It is something, it is anything, which interrupts the course of the every-day life. It may be a loss—it may be a disappointment—it may be a sickness—it may be a death. It may be no one of all these. There are shakings, shocks, thunderings and earthquakes, of the soul, giving no account of themselves. Sometimes in the reading of a book, even a novel—sometimes in the midst of business, in the quiet of the study, in the common routine of the office or the counting-house—sometimes in the converse of the table or the drawing-room—sometimes in what Scripture calls some 'chief place of concourse'—even the ball-room, even the theatre—sometimes (more often) in what Scripture calls 'the visions of the head upon the bed'—something stirs and shakes the soul's private dwelling, interrupts the even tenor of the thoughts and the feelings, and constrains a man to ask himself the three questions—the whence, the where, and the whither—and to collect and recollect himself, to call in the roving con-

stituents of the being, to bring bone to bone and unite himself to reflect and resolve, if so be he may find solution for his questions and peace for his discords.

The immediate result of this shaking, where it has its proper work, will be the earnest effort to amend the life. 'When wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk in my house with a perfect heart.' This is that stage of the process which is represented in the vision by the sinews and the flesh and the skin coming up upon the skeleton so as to complete the framework for the entrance of the quickening spirit. God, whose hand is in all, yet expects this of the man. If he wishes to be saved, he must help the work by a reformation of the life. He must give up, in resolution and honest effort, his known sins. He must exert himself, in resolution and honest effort, to do his known duties. He must walk in his house with what the psalmist means by a perfect, that is, a sincere and upright heart, if he would have God come to him with the quickening transfiguring breath of His Holy Spirit.

And then, sooner or later, not all at once but little by little, that prophecy to the wind, the breath, the spirit, shall make itself audible within, and God Himself shall 'breathe upon the slain,' so that the dead carcass shall become a living man, and the gathering of the bones and

the reconstruction of the frame shall have its perfect work in the reanimation of the whole by the entrance of the life-giving Spirit.

Suffer not the great work, in any of us, to fall short of this its natural yet supernatural consummation. Many are they who have felt the 'noise' and the 'shaking,' the thunder and the earthquake, of the vision, have in some sense collected themselves to respond to it, yet have gone no further towards salvation. Many are they who have felt the necessity of reforming the life, of renouncing evil habit and shaping themselves into a regularity and propriety and decorum of living, yet have stopped there, with the morality of the natural man and the religion of the formalist. The skeleton is clothed with sinew and flesh and skin, but there is no breath in it. O for that call, Come from the four winds, O breath—to make the natural spiritual and the earthly heavenly! 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' even if it be the flesh of reason, or the flesh of duty, or the flesh of virtue—only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. For that Spirit let us pray and not faint. Every one that seeketh findeth—to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL,
November 13, 1892.

TEMPLE CHURCH,
November 20, 1892.

XXIV.

AN INSPIRED DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION.

2 **Peter i. 21.**

(Revised Version.)

Men spake—from God.

IT is a definition of inspiration. A definition simple, precise, exhaustive. 'Men spoke'—spoke, without ceasing (even for the moment of speaking) to be men; spoke with all those characteristics, of phrase and style, of thought and mind, of position and history, which mark and make the man; yet 'spoke from God,' with a message and mission, under an influence and an impulse, a control and a suggestion, which gave to the word spoken a force and a fire, a touch and a contact, a sight and an insight, unlike other utterances because of a breath of God in it, the God of the spirits of all flesh. Theologians talk of the coexistence of a human element and a divine element in the Books which form the Bible. St Peter anticipates all such efforts at

definition. If the revised text and with it the revised version may be trusted¹, he sums up all in four words—four in the English, four also in the Greek—‘men spake, from God.’

On this one Sunday in the year, the 2nd in Advent, our thoughts are authoritatively turned to the subject of holy Scripture: the Collect, the Epistle, the Gospel speak of it: this year, by a happy coincidence, the Lesson also speaks of it, and in a passage so remarkable, and at the same time so difficult, that it may well ask of us a few moments of thoughtful and serious consideration. ¹

St Peter in his advanced age, desirous to leave behind him after his decease an emphatic testimony to the truth of the Gospel, recurs in memory to a wonderful night spent (in attendance upon his Lord) on the mount of the transfiguration.

He recalls a voice there heard from what he calls ‘the excellent glory,’ ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

He regards this voice, heard with his own ears, as a powerful confirmation of Old Testament Scripture in its testimony borne beforehand to the Advent of Christ. And he charges his readers not to think of the office of Old Testa-

¹ The received text was, Ἐλάλησαν οἱ ἅγιοι Θεοῦ ἀνθρωποι. The revised is, Ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ Θεοῦ ἀνθρωποι.

ment Scripture as ended by the first Advent. He compares 'the prophetic word,' the Old Testament as a whole, to a lamp burning in a murky chamber till daybreak shall replace it by the rising of the sun. They might say, these Christians of the first century, 'The sun is risen now—the lamp is no longer wanted.' Has the sun risen yet, he asks, in your hearts? Examine yourselves whether, in this most elementary sense, you are fit to dispense with the Bible. But, if you are, still, remember, the great sun-rising is not yet. The Advent, which prophets seemed to speak of as one, has been proved, by that experience which is the key of prophecy, really to divide itself into a first coming and a second. Not till the second Advent will the lamp of the Bible have done its work.

This thought introduces another. What is the Bible? Is it a volume of human origination, as it is of course a series of human compositions? Was it that a long succession of thinkers and seers offered, one by one, out of their own heads, a solution of difficult problems of life, or of lingering mysteries in religion? 'No prophecy of Scripture,' St Peter says—and he is not limiting himself to the predictions of Scripture, he is using 'prophecy' in its proper sense of 'inspired utterance' whatever its subject—'No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation.' It is

not a matter of 'individual solution,' as if the writer himself undertook to interpret some secret of divine dealing for the information or satisfaction of his readers. 'No prophecy,' he goes on to say—that is, no book and no section of Scripture, whatever its nature, whether predictive or monitory or even historical—'ever came,' was ever brought, 'by the will of a man; but, moved by a Holy Spirit, men spake from God.'

No testimony could be more explicit to the inspiration of the Bible. It is the testimony of the New Testament to the Old. And it is the Old Testament which needs the testimony. Christians have no difficulty in accepting the New Testament. They understand that the Saviour spoke the words of God by an inspiration direct and self-evidencing. 'We speak,' He said, 'that we do know, and testify that we have seen.' They understand, on the strength of His own promise, that the apostles were inspired by a direct gift of insight into truth, whether of fact or faith. For the inspiration of the Old Testament they can only look to the New. The treatment of it by our Lord, His constant appeal to it in controversy, His constant reference to it as fulfilled in Himself—the express assertion of its inspiration by St Paul and St Peter—are the grounds on which we, who were never under the Law, believe the

earlier and larger half of the Bible to be, in some true sense, an integral part of the inspired word of God. 'Man spake,' in it also, 'from God.'

But does this explain, does this decide, does this settle everything? Does this forbid questioning, does this preclude enquiry, either as to the nature, the meaning, the compass of inspiration, —or as to the readings and renderings, the dates and the authorships, the contents by book and chapter, of the volume for which we claim this august character, that the breath of God is in it? One thing it ought to do. The very word 'inspiration,' the very claim of a something unique and exclusive for this Book of books, the Bible, ought to secure a tone of seriousness, ought to guarantee a spirit of earnestness, in all who would touch the very hem of the subject. Given these two, the seriousness which is one thing, and the earnestness which is another —and we may well believe that the life spent in enquiry, whether into the text or into the history or into the connexion and composition of the Bible may be far more acceptable in the sight of God, whatever its conclusions, than the unenquiring acceptance of the whole on a mere tradition of the elders, or the angry acrimonious condemnation, as if in protection of God Himself, of the humble in-

vestigator who finds some things untenable in the received opinion, and can no longer echo the platitudes which pass for beliefs in the Church-world of his time.

‘Men spake.’ ‘Human beings,’ St Peter says—the ‘men’ is emphatic. Shall we blame those who, first of all, would ask, Who? would busy themselves in the endeavour, by examination and comparison, to learn what can be learnt of the authorship of particular books; and would then go on to ask, What? in other words, to bring every appliance, of manuscript and version and ancient quotation, to bear upon the text of Scripture; to ascertain as exactly as possible the very phrase, by word and letter, in which the thought of the ‘human being’ who spake stamped itself upon the page which was to be its record?

Enquiries like these are only for the learned. But let us, who can but look on or listen, at least refrain from denunciations of a process for which we ought to have the deepest respect—not bound, indeed, to accept, as an authority, every or indeed any conclusion, but bound, as a sacred duty, to encourage those who have the ability to ‘prove all things,’ if only for the honour of the Gospel, the very soul of which is truth—on the very front of which is inscribed the command to ‘search and look,’ the invitation to ‘come and see.’

Men spake. And does not St Peter as good as say, And remained men in the speaking? Where is the authority for supposing that the inspiring Spirit levelled the intellects, obliterated the characteristics, overwhelmed the peculiarities, of the several writers, so that St Paul, St John, St James, St Peter, might be mistaken one for the other in the finished work? These are the glosses, the fancies, the inventions, with which prejudice and fanaticism have overlaid the subject, and given great advantage, by doing so, to the caviller and the sceptic.

Men spake. And one of them has told us how. By a careful investigation of various writings going before, and an earnest endeavour to arrange in their true order the facts of the history which he was to chronicle. You see how absolutely independent the faith itself is of apparent inaccuracies or superficial discrepancies in the writings which are its records. That which St Luke says of his Gospel, other evangelists treat as not needing to be said—namely, that God did not flood with a superfluous and a misleading illumination the page which was to be the description of the life of the Son of God below.

Men spake—and men wrote—and they were men still. Matters which toil and pains could ascertain—matters which lay in the province of

intellect, whether in the way of research or in the way of discovery—matters for which God had provided the instrument of knowledge in the human being as by Him created, even though ages and generations might come and go before the actual knowledge was made his own—on these things inspiration was silent. Men were to speak, and to speak to men, and, if to speak, then to speak in men's language, and, if to speak in men's language, then not in the language of men who should be born ten or twenty centuries later, but in the language of men then on the earth—on their level, not above it—not to anticipate science, not to reveal science, but to tell of things which science could never tell of, things lying in a world out of sight, the world of a spiritual present, or the world of an invisible hereafter.

Men spake, and in speaking were men still. Even their message, even the thing they were sent to tell, must be expressed in terms of human speech, through a medium therefore of adaptation and accommodation. St Paul himself expresses this thought when he says, 'At present we see by a mirror, in riddle'—see but the reflexion of the very thing that is, hear but in enigma the absolute truth. 'Then'—in 'that world'—then at last 'face to face.'

If I dwell at so much length on this half of

the subject, it is because I feel that it has in it the strength and the comfort needed for these times. I would set the faith out of reach of cavils and controversies which have no terror but for the uninstructed and the superstitious. There is a timidity which shrinks from the half-text, 'Men spake,' only to lose thereby the other half also, 'spake from God.' It is only by refusing to accept, with all its consequences, the human element, that we run any risk of being robbed of the divine. For then we stake the divinity of the inspiration upon a hypothesis which cannot maintain itself, that of an absence of any imperfection, whether of fact or science, whether of figure or number, whether of date or cipher, in the received record of the divine word.

Men spake—from God. 'Moved by the Holy Ghost.'

The two halves of the text are dependent upon each other.

Men spake. Not angels—that is one thought. Not machines—that is another. Not angels—or they had no sympathetic, no audible voice for man. Not machines—or speech (which is, by definition, intelligence in communication) had been a contradiction in terms.

These human beings spake from God. For He had something to say, and to say to man.

There is something which God only can say.

There is something which reason cannot say, nor experience, nor discovery, nor the deepest insight, nor the happiest guessing, nor the most sagacious foresight. There is a world of heaven, which flesh and blood cannot penetrate. There is a world of spirit, impervious even to mind. There is a world beyond death, between which and the living there is an impassable gulf fixed. More than this—there is a world of cause and consequence, which no moralist can connect or piece together. There is a world of providence, which gives no account of itself to the observer. There is a world of divine dealing—with lives, with souls, with nations, with ages—of which even the inspired man must say, ‘Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me: it is high: I cannot attain to it.’

More yet than this. There is a fact of sin, inherited and handed on, working everywhere in hearts and lives, spoiling God’s work and ruining man’s welfare. Who can tell, concerning this, whether indeed there is any recovery from this deep, this terrible, this fatal fall? Who can tell whether this fact, this state, of sin admits of any sort of atonement such as shall reconcile the sinful world with the God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; whether for the individual sinner there is any sort of fountain opened in which he may wash and be clean; whether the

forgiveness is to be purchased by sacrifice, and, if so, by whose; whether there is any possibility of an effectual purification, such as shall render the defiled and corrupted being capable of admission into an eternity of blessedness? Who can discover these things? Who can know them but God? And yet man needs to hear of these things. Man's life is low and mean and poor unless and until he hears of them. And they can only be told in one way. Wind and fire and earthquake cannot speak them. And the need is not a want. Men can live and die quite contentedly in ignorance of them. There is but one way of getting them spoken. The man must be found, the man must be educated, the man must be inspired, who shall speak them.

By one of His special dealings God will do each of these things. Sometimes a child has been His choice. Sometimes an old man. Sometimes a priest—sometimes a layman. Whatever the condition of the person called, he needs something more to qualify him for the particular work—which is that of writing a book in the Bible—often an oral business in the first instance, but the writing is the point today. He is to be a prophet: one of God's utterers: one of the immortal utterers, whose utterance, of whatever kind, is to be of no 'private interpretation'—

that is, not an 'individual solution' of difficulties or mysteries—but something taught him of God to be said to men—to the man of all time.

This is what the writer of a book in the Bible was to do. He was to say something, eventually to write something, which only God could tell—something about life, its real meaning, its true work; something about the future, its reality, its nearness, its connexion with, its dependence upon, time present; something about the way of peace—how to find forgiveness, how to get that holiness which alone can see God. These are among the subjects of which men had to speak from God. And with this clue, how will you find every book of the Old Testament spring into new meaning. These topics run all through it. It was to help men to see this kind of thing, that the Bible, and each book of the Bible, was written. It was to show God in some new light—in some light in which He could not have been discovered by human wit or wisdom: it was to make Him real and present, living and acting, and so to bring Him back into a world which had got rid of Him: in short, to secure that result which is so often made the express object of particular paragraphs of the Bible, 'And ye shall know that I am the Lord.'

And confess now, you who have gone with

us thus far, how utterly beside the mark of such a work as this would have been an inspiration of science, or an inspiration of geography, or an inspiration of history, or an inspiration of geology, astronomy, botany or chemistry. If you have ever been disturbed by an imputation of error in the first chapter of Genesis, as to the order of creation, or as to days before the sun, or anything of that nature, dismiss the distress as an ignorance, as a hallucination, as an impiety. Say to yourself, Men spake: but this not as an excuse—no, as the glory of the Bible: it was not given to teach science, or to use scientific terms, or to correct scientific mistakes: men spake, and they spake from God. He had that to tell which men by searching could not find out. He set this human being to tell it to his fellows. He put into his mind and into his heart the thing that was to be said. If it was to be said at this particular moment, no doubt He told it him at that moment. If it was a more general truth to be impressed, the inspiration itself was not special but inherent: the man was inspired rather than the book.

But O trust God to do the right thing! Do not mistrust Him, and summon Him to the bar of your poor intellect, every time that you cannot quite see what He was about. When men challenge you as to your idea of inspiration—

when they say, How can you account for an army of hundreds of thousands in little Judah? how can you account for a slaughter of twenty thousand men in one tiny battle-field in Beth-horon or on mount Ephraim? how can you explain the dumb ass speaking with man's voice, or Samuel coming up again at the bidding of the witch of Endor, or the sun standing still over Gibeon, or any of the stock difficulties which cavillers call the impossibilities of the Bible?—say, if you are wise, with the three Israelites to king Nebuchadnezzar, 'I am not careful to answer thee in this matter.' Men spake—and, while they spake, they were men still. But they spake from God—and what they said from Him was truth and nothing but truth, and in it, thus spoken, is the very light of my life. Never will I part with that light, till I reach a world which no longer wants it, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light thereof.

TEMPLE CHURCH,
December 4, 1892.

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